

THE LONG TAKE IN MODERN EUROPEAN CINEMA

by

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Christopher Stuart Marnoch, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the long take, as both a practical technique and a critical concept, in modern European cinema. Starting with the advent of Italian neorealism, modern European cinema rose to prominence in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, in collective movements such as the French New Wave, New German Cinema and the new cinemas of Central and Eastern Europe, and in the innovations of many individual filmmakers across the continent. The stylistic developments of this period sought to challenge classical cinema's conventional practices, such as analytical editing, and the long take became a particularly popular option for filmmakers at the time. The innovations of the long take in modern European cinema revolve around three critical issues, each elaborated in the work of a particular writer: an increased realism based on the respect for spatial and temporal integrity (André Bazin), an emphasis on duration resulting from a crisis of action (Gilles Deleuze), and the dedramatisation of narrative action (David Bordwell). This thesis rigorously examines the ideas of these writers in relation to concrete examples, and tests the extent to which their theories provide a comprehensive explanation of the long take in modern European cinema. The thesis also considers the practice of the long take in greater depth by exploring how its broadly defined qualities are reflected in different ways and put to different purposes in a number of individual films. This is done through the detailed analysis of key long-take films of the period, by filmmakers such as Michelangelo Antonioni, Andrei Tarkovsky, Miklós Jancsó, Jean-Luc Godard and others. By focusing on a specific stylistic feature within this broad area of study, the thesis intends to further understand the critical significance of certain directorial decisions, and to contribute to aesthetic debates surrounding this important period of film history.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the long take, as both a practical technique and a critical concept, in modern European cinema. Starting with the advent of Italian neorealism in the immediate aftermath of World War II, modern European cinema rose to prominence in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. It was represented by collective national movements such as the French New Wave, New German Cinema and the new cinemas of Central and Eastern Europe, and, more specifically, in the innovations of many individual filmmakers across the continent during this period. The stylistic experimentation of European filmmakers in these decades sought to challenge the conventional practices of classical cinema, the most prominent of these being analytical editing: the process whereby scenes are broken down into a series of shots that focus on the details that are deemed to be most significant in relation to the drama and the narrative, while maintaining a sense of continuity in space and time, as though the events presented on the screen continue to exist beyond the limits of the frame. Some filmmakers working in post-war Europe upset this harmonious film form by purposely revealing, and even accentuating, the discontinuities of editing through jump cuts that fragmented the space and time of the events.

But there was also another form that rose to prominence during this period, one which posed an equally radical challenge to classical film style. For a certain group of filmmakers, rather than pursuing a highly discontinuous aesthetic, they would utilise the ability of the long take to render events in their complete unity, maintaining the continuity of physical space and action, as well as the duration of these features. By adopting the long take, directors such as Michelangelo Antonioni, Andrei Tarkovsky and Miklós Jancsó could depict not only the details of a scene but

the relations between these details; they built their films out of the connections and the tensions that arose between characters and their surrounding environment, between the human form and the landscapes of the city or countryside, between the movements of one individual or group and another. It is this practice, and its theoretical implications, that are of interest in the chapters that follow.

By focusing on a specific stylistic feature within this broad area of study, the thesis intends to further understand the critical significance of certain directorial decisions, and to contribute to aesthetic debates surrounding this important period of film history. I shall pursue this aim by drawing especially on the critical method of detailed scene analysis, believing that through close description and interpretation of particular examples we can greater appreciate how style works to shape our understanding and experience of the films in question. However, this will also be augmented with careful reflection on existing ideas and observations about individual films and wider trends, confirming those that I believe to offer particular insight into the questions raised by my title, and strengthening these notions with reference to concrete examples. In this introduction I shall begin, however, by first outlining the existing literature on the period of modern European cinema, identifying the broad themes and issues that will guide my own research in the following chapters, and placing my work within the matrix of critical thought on the topic. We shall also consider how the long take has been defined as a filmmaking technique, and the problems surrounding its definition, before I offer my own working explanation that will guide my approach to the technique in the analyses that follow. Finally this introduction will outline the overall shape of the thesis and the focus of each chapter.

Modern European Cinema in Film Studies

A large body of literature on modern European cinema has accumulated since early responses to the films of the neorealist directors in the second half of the 1940s. Most of the writing on this period comprises either auteur studies of individual filmmakers or work on localised movements, especially national ones, the most prominent of these being Italian neorealism and the French New Wave. These studies are very helpful for identifying specific instances of the filmmaking approach that is of interest here and throughout this work I shall draw frequently on these observations about particular filmmakers and films, and localised group styles.¹ However, these works do not account for the wider geographical and historical developments of filmmaking in Europe in the post-war decades. The perspective of this thesis is broader in its nature, seeing modern cinema as a pan-European phenomenon that lasted from the end of the war to the 1970s.

There is, however, a smaller but significant body of literature that has sought to look beyond the limited scope of the studies just mentioned, focusing on the more wide-scale developments in film style and narrative across the work of filmmakers in various European countries. This thesis situates itself within this critical tradition. In his important essay ‘The Evolution of the Language of Cinema’, published in the early 1950s, the French critic and founder of *Cahiers du Cinéma* André Bazin recognised ‘the beginning of a new period’ with the films of Orson Welles and, even more so, with the neorealists, who formed ‘part of a general movement, of a vast stirring of the geological bed of cinema, confirming that everywhere up to a point there had been a revolution in the language of the screen’ (Bazin 1967: 37). Bazin died at the end of the 1950s and therefore he did not witness the full ‘revolution’ that

¹ For a list of these studies see the bibliography in this thesis.

would take place in the 1960s and 1970s. Nonetheless, his critical writing on neorealism forms an important bedrock for our understanding of the filmmakers that would follow, who were often influenced by neorealism, if not by Bazin's ideas directly. And in this thesis, I take Bazin's arguments about realism as a central theoretical principle underlining my understanding of the long take in modern European cinema.

In an early academic study of modern European cinema, *The Altering Eye: Contemporary International Cinema* (1983), Robert Phillip Kolker looks at post-war filmmaking in Europe, and beyond, identifying a tradition of narrative modernism in these films that challenges conventional, classical narrative and style. For Kolker, this period is defined firstly by a concern for realism that develops from neorealism. He also recognises a preoccupation with form in the work of many filmmakers from the late 1950s onwards, as well as an interest in themes of politics, psychology and memory. His study provides a helpful overview of many films and movements during this period, recognising some of the broad stylistic qualities and interests they share.

A more important study of modern European cinema, also published in the early 1980s, is the French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze's two-volume study of the cinema, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (1986) and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1989).² In the break between these two volumes Deleuze identifies the major turning point in film history from classical cinema to modern cinema. The break is initiated by neorealism in the immediate post-war years and is continued in the work of European filmmakers in the 1960s and 1970s, especially in the French New Wave and the New German Cinema. For Deleuze, the defining feature of modern cinema is its turn from an emphasis on movement and action to an emphasis on time. In this thesis,

² These books were originally published in French as *Cinéma 1: L'image-mouvement* in 1983 and *Cinéma 2: L'image-temps* in 1985.

Deleuze's ideas become another fundamental theoretical framework for my investigation of these filmmakers, and I seek to examine how duration in the shot is central to the aesthetic impact of these films.

In his 1985 study *Narration in the Fiction Film*, David Bordwell also recognises a wider tradition of filmmaking centred in Europe between the 1950s and 1970s, which challenged classical film style. Bordwell conceives this distinction specifically in narrative terms, however, identifying an alternative narrational 'mode' that emerges with neorealism. 'Art-cinema narration' opposes the tight causality that underpins classical narration by promoting, instead, a more tenuous connection between events, a greater sense of open-endedness and use of ambiguity in its presentation of the story. For Bordwell these features amount to an alternative set of conventions dictating this form of narrative practiced by filmmakers of the period. In his more recent study, *Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging* (2005) Bordwell expands on these earlier observations and he identifies an aesthetic of dedramatisation, which is established through the deployment of certain staging and compositional strategies in the shot. For Bordwell, this visual and narrative dedramatisation becomes a defining characteristic of modern European cinema. Bordwell's observations also form part of the conceptual basis of my approach to the films studied in this thesis.

Most recently, two book-length studies have continued this tradition of scholarship on modern European cinema. The first of these is András Bálint Kovács's *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980* (2007). Kovács's book forms the most extensive study of the period to date, examining and defining it from a variety of different perspectives, including narrative style and subjects, genres, formal principles and visual styles. He also traces the history of modern European cinema

from its birth in the 1940s to its decline in the 1970s. His multifaceted and complex account of the period is especially informative and I frequently refer to his comments and ideas throughout this thesis. The other recent study that has been helpful in my thinking in this research is Mark Betz's *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema* (2009). Here, Betz provides a thorough overview of the critical responses to the period since its emergence and identifies some guiding principles on its theorisation within film studies. With a more reduced scope, he focuses in particular on modern cinema in France and Italy during the 1950s and 1960s. Rather than matters of film style specifically, his work aims to place these films in relation to different contexts of the historical period, considering, for example, the industrial practices of international coproduction and subtitling, the reflection of political developments such as decolonisation in the films, and the collective form of the omnibus film that was popular at the time. Though these issues do not directly influence my discussions here, they provide some helpful background knowledge to the historical period.

These studies all identify a broad cinematic tradition of narrative filmmaking in post-war Europe that was international in its scope and defined largely in opposition to conventional practices of classical narrative cinema, represented most notably by Hollywood production during the studio era. There is also a general consensus on the periodisation of modern European cinema, with its broadest limits extending from the late 1940s to the late 1970s. For most writers, neorealism marks a definitive starting point, or at least a significant precursor, while the second half of the 1970s represents a period of decline in this form of filmmaking. Kovács provides the most definitive outline of the period, with a chronology and list of films that, for him,

constitutes modern European cinema.³ It is always tentative to place firm boundaries around periods of film history, and I am aware that the type of filmmaking that is in question in this thesis does not simply stop at the end of the 1970s; filmmakers have continued to practice similar forms to this day, however, this has been more isolated and has not amounted to the same clearly defined film culture and network of filmmakers that it was in the post-war decades. For this reason, I see the value in continuing to use the historical periodisation that is shared by the writers previously outlined.

This thesis has been informed to a great extent by the preceding studies and the work of three writers – Bazin, Deleuze and Bordwell – forms the theoretical core of my assessment. This thesis differs from the preceding works, however, in its specific focus within the period in question. Here, I examine a particular tradition *within* modern European cinema that is based primarily on the use of the long take. While the long take is discussed by the previous critics to a greater or lesser extent, none have placed it as the central topic of their enquiry. My work therefore aims to provide the most comprehensive account of the technique, within this historical and geographical framework, by examining it in its various (but interrelated) conceptual dimensions and in the work of a range of filmmakers. This study will be limited historically to the period from the late 1940s until the end of the 1970s, which largely follows the periodisation indicated in the work of the writers cited above. Like them, I believe the post-war decades to mark a high point in modern European cinema, with a

³ See *Screening Modernism* (Kovács 2007: 402-407). This list only begins at the end of the 1950s, however, which is the point where Kovács argues modern cinema fully emerges. For him, neorealism marks a precursor, but is not definitively modern. On this point I disagree with Kovács.

sizable community of filmmakers influenced by and influencing each other.⁴ Following the 1970s modern European cinema went into decline, but long-take filmmaking has continued, albeit to a lesser extent and more dispersed across the globe than in this previous period. European filmmakers such as Béla Tarr, Pedro Costa and Michael Haneke have maintained a filmmaking practice based on the extensive use of the long take, influenced to a great degree by the innovations of their earlier predecessors. And outside of Europe, the long take has become popular among filmmakers, especially in East Asia, such as Hou Hsiao-Hsien and Tsai Ming-Liang. Critics have labelled the work of these filmmakers as ‘slow’ or ‘contemplative’ cinema, aimed against the increasing speed and fragmentation of digital media in the twenty-first century.⁵ My interest here is primarily with those filmmakers working in the post-war period, however, and this thesis will leave aside these more contemporary examples of the long take.

There is also another point of clarification that should be indicated before moving forward. In the existing literature on the period the terms modern cinema and art cinema tend to be used interchangeably, something that is demonstrated especially by Betz and Kovács in their studies. Here, I opt only to use the term modern cinema to reflect the influence of Deleuze’s conception on my thinking about this period and to emphasise the essential modernity, or modernism, which distinguishes these films from the conventions of classical cinema. The post-war decades marked a resurgence of a modernist impulse that had earlier flourished during the interwar years, especially in the 1920s, in several national film movements, such as German Expressionism,

⁴ Kovács provides the most detailed overview of the connections between these filmmakers, identifying prominent trends and lines of influence in modern European cinema during this period. See *Screening Modernism* (Kovács 2007: 203-213).

⁵ For a concise outline of this contemporary mode of filmmaking see Matthew Flanagan’s essay ‘Towards an Aesthetic of Slow in Contemporary Cinema’ (Flanagan 2008).

Soviet Montage, French Impressionism and others.⁶ For John Orr, in his study on cinema and modernity, the post-war modern period thus reflects ‘a Nietzschean *return* to the modern, to the earlier moment of high modernism’, and he refers to this later wave as ‘neo-modern’ to emphasise its basis in the previous period, constituting ‘a return to the modern in a more technically advanced form’ (Orr 1993: 2-3). As Orr suggests, with the formal experiments that filmmakers conducted during the 1920s, ‘film had paraded its potential as a medium of fertile dissonance, as a new visual form of representation which could be culturally subversive’ (Orr 1993: 16). And this attitude of dissonance and subversion was also shared by European filmmakers after World War II in their own formal experimentations. However, some important differences also exist between the two periods, which indicate that modern European cinema does not mark a simple return to the modernism of the silent era, but constitutes a distinct post-war phenomenon.

The interwar modernist European cinema essentially represented a cinematic response to the artistic modernism that had already developed in other art forms. Film, which was still a relatively new medium at this time, had not yet developed into its own state of classicism, from which filmmakers could then initiate a medium-specific modernist response. Thus, as Kovács points out, ‘because cinema did not have an artistic tradition proper to its medium to modernize’, filmmakers instead worked ‘to create cinematic versions of modernist movements in fine arts, theatre, and literature’ (Kovács 2007: 17). In particular, silent modernist cinema turned to the visual abstraction pioneered in modernist painting of the time to eschew conventions of perspective and naturalism in pictorial representation. This becomes notably apparent

⁶ For a helpful overview of these movements and of silent film modernism in general see David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson’s *Film History: An Introduction, Second Edition* (Bordwell and Thompson: 2003: 81-142).

in Expressionist films such as Robert Weine's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (*Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, 1920), where the design of sets and backdrops, costume, make-up and lighting work to emulate the graphic distortions and overtly unnatural representation of environments that painters created on the canvas to evoke disturbed psychological states. Modern European cinema differs from this earlier approach, however, because its modernism is primarily internal to film culture itself, reflecting on the medium's own, more fully developed, history and established narrative forms. Kovács points out that “modern cinema” as a concept appeared in the 1940s. The opposition between “classical” and “modern” cinema is a genuinely postwar creation’ (Kovács 2007: 21). In other words, by this decade, cinema had established its own sense of history and a dominant, classical narrative form, represented most prominently in Hollywood, to which post-war filmmakers could now form a genuine response. The classical sound cinema was only established after the modernist turn in silent film, coming to dominate commercial filmmaking in the 1930s.⁷ The films of modern European directors working in the post-war decades have their basis in the same narrative and genre frameworks that were established by classical narrative cinema, but they adopt alternative aesthetic means to depict their fictions.

Another important distinction between modern European cinema and interwar modernist cinema relates to the particular concerns of this thesis. In the earlier period, editing was the predominant stylistic means of formal innovation. As Kovács points out, ‘montage was by far the most important discovery of modernism in the twenties’, and ‘radical forms of early modernism in the avant-garde as well as in the commercial art film were created on the discontinuous side’ (Kovács 2007: 126). Filmmakers

⁷ The demise of modernist cinema in this decade can, in fact, be seen to result in part from the dominance of classical narrative film with the coming of sound. The other major factor signaling the end of silent modernism was the censorship and control imposed on filmmakers by totalitarian regimes in Europe in the early 1930s.

turned to editing as a primary means to introduce artistic abstraction into the cinematic image and thus break away from a realistic representation of space and time. Furthermore, through editing, filmmakers could assert their artistic control over the image and its ability to create meaning. For example, in Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's Surrealist masterwork *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), the cutting between disparate images creates a disturbingly bizarre and symbolic dreamscape evoking the unconscious mind. Alternatively, in Sergei Eisenstein's famous works of Soviet Montage, such as *Strike* (*Stachka*, 1925) and *Battleship Potemkin* (*Bronenosets Potyomkin*, 1925), the editing constructs intellectual associations between images to convey ideas of political revolution. In modern European cinema there remains an emphasis on radical editing techniques in many films, but this is balanced with an equally radical rejection of editing in numerous other films. As Kovács notes, 'we should rather speak of two equally typical versions of the late modern film form: *radical continuity* and *radical discontinuity*', and 'both tendencies were represented by equally influential and numerous films' (Kovács 2007: 126). The long take can therefore also be considered a modern technique, marking a conscious avoidance of established continuity and editing conventions. In the chapters that follow, some more localised differences between modern European cinema and interwar cinematic modernism will also become clear when discussing particular aesthetic issues surrounding the long take. Having indicated my area of study, and the positioning of this thesis in relation to existing scholarship on the period, we should now turn specifically to the long take itself, to outline how it has been considered and how I intend to understand it here.

Defining the Long Take

Establishing a definition of the long take would appear to be a straightforward task, and yet, it is perhaps one of the most difficult. As Valerie Orpen states, ‘long takes are easily recognised but not so easily defined. What exactly qualifies as a long take?’ (Orpen 2003: 78). A number of scholars have attempted to answer this question, some more successfully than others. Bazin is the first critic to fully identify the long take as a stylistic entity, though he tends to use the terms ‘shot in depth’ or ‘sequence shot’ to describe it. Bazin does not offer a definition as such, but he sees the technique in the absence of editing.⁸ This emphasis on the long take as the refusal of editing is a significant feature that this thesis shares. But subsequent to Bazin’s writings other critics have attempted to give more formal definitions. The problem, however, is that these tend to be very general. Brian Henderson, for instance, in his essay entitled ‘The Long Take’ (1976), describes the technique as ‘a single piece of unedited film, which may or may not constitute an entire sequence’ (Henderson 1976: 315). David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, in the glossary of their textbook *Film Art: An Introduction* (1996), define the long take in equally vague terms as ‘a shot that continues for an unusually lengthy time before the transition to the next shot’ (Bordwell and Thompson 1996: 479). These critics do point to an important defining quality of the long take, which is its length. The long take is a shot in which its ‘unusual’ length is a defining factor, but they do not specify how.

More recently, in his unpublished thesis on time and the long take, Donato Totaro has attempted to establish a more rigorous definition by turning to statistical analysis. He argues that, ‘based on years of research and film viewing, the lowest numerical duration at which a shot has been referred to as a long take is in the 25-40

⁸ See ‘The Evolution of the Language of Cinema’ (Bazin 1967: 31-34).

second range' (Totaro 2001: 4). Totaro draws on the statistical analysis of scholars such as Colin Crisp, Barry Salt and Bordwell, taking their average shot length (ASL) calculations for different periods and different national cinemas, and their comments on the frequency of longer shots. Totaro concludes that 'empirical evidence leads to a general, unstated consensus of approximately 25"-40"' as the general length at which a shot can begin to be thought of as a long take' (Totaro 2001: 7). Totaro's efforts to provide a precise temporal definition of the long take is commendable, however such statistical analysis does not reveal the qualities that define the long take as we experience it while watching a film; neither does it offer any sense of the aesthetic features that filmmakers might be drawn to. A definition of the long take should therefore aim to qualify, rather than quantify the technique. As Mark Le Fanu notes in his essay reflecting on Bazin's notions about the long take from the perspective of the late 1990s:

In general, I think it is important in the definition of the long take to go for the spirit of the thing, not the letter ... it is not so much the actual length of the take that is crucial (as though it were measured by a stop-watch) but the fact that ... [it] is geared towards con-templative engagement. (Le Fanu 1997)

Le Fanu stresses here that, rather than being understood numerically, the temporal definition of the long take should relate to its aesthetic effect, and how this shapes our involvement with the shot. Following this line of thought, the thesis presented in the following pages explicitly avoids statistical analysis as a means for judging the long take in the films analysed, focusing instead on the temporal qualities of the technique.

In her book on film editing, Orpen provides the broadest attempt to define the long take to date. She suggests that there are four categories in which a long take can be identified. Firstly she argues that 'a take is "long" if it obviously and substantially exceeds the average shot length of most films of that period/genre/national

cinema/style, and so on' (Orpen 2003: 78). Furthermore, 'it is "long" if it obviously and substantially exceeds the average shot length of the rest of the film' (Orpen 2003: 78). Here, Orpen reflects an emphasis on statistical analysis and measurement, similar to Totaro, though she does provide some context from which to judge such measurements. But like the previous critic, these notions are still limited by attempting to define the technique by its counted length. If these categories are quite limited for our purposes, Orpen's final two categories are more helpful. She writes that a take 'is "long" if it lasts beyond a certain point, because the shot is so complex and densely saturated with visual information that it requires more time to be assimilated', and conversely, 'it is "long" if it lasts beyond a certain point, namely the point at which the audience is able to assimilate the shot's information' (Orpen 2003: 78). These two categories come much closer to understanding the qualities that make a long take; on the one hand, there is a sense of totality in the action while on the other there is an emphasis on time as a felt quality in the shot.

My working definition of the long take in this thesis is based on these two aesthetic qualities. Firstly, the long take can be identified when the action is maintained in a single shot, where we recognise that it would ordinarily be divided by editing. This idea follows directly from Bazin's notions about deep-focus composition and the sequence shot. The long take is defined by its quality of wholeness, of preserving the relations between elements in the scene. The other significant feature of the long take relates to time. We can say that a take is experienced as 'long' when time becomes a felt quality of the shot, or where its duration becomes an essential factor of its aesthetic. This follows from Deleuze's observations on the temporal focus of modern cinema, where time is no longer the medium for movement and action to take place, but becomes a feature of our attention itself. Throughout this thesis, the

long take will therefore be discussed in terms of its qualities of wholeness and temporality.

The long take enjoys a prominent position within modern European cinema, yet its history can be traced back before the period in question in this thesis, even to the beginnings of cinema itself. Le Fanu points out that ‘cinema itself was born with the long take, in the sense that editing wasn’t developed until the late 1890s’ (Le Fanu 2005: 5). In its first decade, the cinema was defined by single-shot films that depicted an individual event. For example, in the Lumière brothers’ *La sortie des usines Lumière à Lyon* (*Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*, 1895) we watch a set of factory doors open, a stream of workers exit the building and the doors then close once all have left. And in their *L’arrivée d’un train en gare de La Ciotat* (*The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station*, 1896) the film shows an empty station platform before a train approaches the camera, coming to a halt at the station, and we then see the bustle of people getting on and off. Although these films are brief, they capture the action in a single shot, which demonstrates a certain quality of wholeness that is central to my understanding of the long take. In the early 1900s editing was introduced as films became longer, more narratively complex and included multiple scenes. But even in these films, the scenes still tended to be presented in single shots, with cutting used only to move from one to the next. For example, in Edwin S. Porter’s famous *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) the opening scene is presented in a static long shot covering the entire space as two gunmen hold up a clerk in a railway station office. After the action has played out and the gunmen leave the office, the film cuts to the next scene outside the station, which is again depicted in a single long shot as a train pulls up to load coal and the robbers sneak aboard. The development of analytical editing techniques over the 1910s would slowly break down the integrity of

space and action demonstrated in earlier films such as this, refining cinema's narrative capabilities by isolating and linking particular details within scenes.

The use of the long take in modern European cinema marks something of a return to the ontological immediacy of early cinema's depiction of events, as demonstrated in the previous examples. However, in the post-war filmmaking explored here, the technique is significantly different from the approach of the early pioneer filmmakers in both its conception and execution. In the later period, it constitutes a stylistic choice, consciously adopted against the established editing practices of classical cinema. By contrast, the single-shot scene of early cinema is not a stylistic choice as such because no alternative method existed at the time. An important part of how the long take has been defined, and how I continue to understand it here, relates to its oppositional status; it can be identified by the absence of editing. Thus, the existence of editing itself, and its dominance of standardised film form, becomes an important prerequisite for the existence of the long take as a stylistic phenomenon.

However, a tradition of using the long take intentionally, in favour of editing, can be observed before modern European cinema, in certain films of the 1920s and 1930s. In his essay on the evolution of film style, Bazin traces back the prehistory of the long take before the 'revolution' brought about by the films of Welles and the neorealists. Bazin draws attention to a small but important group of filmmakers that avoided the methods of both modernist montage and classical analytical editing that were widespread in the pre-war period. For example, he observes how, in the famous scene of the seal hunt in *Nanook of the North* (1922), Robert Flaherty uses a single shot to show 'the relation between Nanook and the animal; the actual length of the waiting period', rather than cutting the action to speed it up: 'the length of the hunt is

the very substance of the image, its true object' (Bazin 1967: 27). Bazin also draws attention to F. W. Murnau's interest in the integrity of dramatic space through his mobile tracking shots in films such as *Der Letzte Mann* (*The Last Laugh*, 1924) and *Sunrise* (1927), which 'forces it to reveal its structural depth' and 'to bring out the preexisting relations which become constitutive of the drama' (Bazin 1967: 27). Bazin also mentions Erich von Stroheim as another filmmaker in the 1920s, whose work is defined against the use of editing.⁹ However, the most important long-take filmmaker of the pre-war period, as Bazin suggests, was Jean Renoir. Throughout the 1930s, Renoir developed a more extensive and sophisticated long-take style than any other filmmaker of the time. For example, in *La grande illusion* (*Grand Illusion*, 1937) and *La règle du jeu* (*The Rules of the Game*, 1939), lengthy takes cover a multiplicity of actions staged throughout the depth of the shot, together with a highly mobile camera that follows characters for extended periods before shifting its focus onto others. Bazin writes that Renoir's films exemplify 'a film form that would permit everything to be said without chopping the world up into little fragments, that would reveal the hidden meanings in people and things without disturbing the unity natural to them' (Bazin 1967: 38). Therefore, by avoiding the use of editing, stressing instead the wholeness of the action and its temporal unfolding, Renoir and the previous filmmakers developed a tradition of using the long take that would be taken to more extraordinary lengths by modern European filmmakers from the late 1940s to the late 1970s.

But although filmmakers such as Flaherty, Murnau and Renoir mark a general precedent to the long-take technique of the filmmakers explored in this thesis, there are also some significant differences between them. It is these differences that

⁹ See 'The Evolution of the Language of Cinema' (Bazin 1967: 26-28).

distinguish the long-take practice that is my concern in this work. In the earlier examples cited, the long take is used primarily to build the drama and to involve us in the developments of the plot. For example, in the hunt scene from *Nanook of the North*, the shot conveys the increasing tension of the event depicted, and it aligns us with the hunter as he waits for the optimum moment to strike. Or in the famous scene from *Sunrise*, when the protagonist meets the woman from the city, the mobile long take works to build tension and to draw us into the story as it negotiates the eerie, deserted woodland, at first following the man before turning to reveal the women waiting in the moonlight. Moreover, in *La règle du jeu*, Renoir constructs a dramatic web between the multiple characters in and around the chateau where much of the film is set, depicting their various liaisons and confrontations through the continuous space and time of the long take, which places us firmly within the developing action.

In modern European cinema, the qualities of wholeness and temporality in the long take are employed to create a much different aesthetic. Here, the long take is characterised by a heightened sense of ambiguity and instability surrounding the meaning of events and it is also marked by a slowness of time, which becomes noticeably detached from the developments of the action. These features work to challenge our ordinary ways of seeing the world and to shift our engagement away from traditional features of narrative and dramaturgy. The Italian neorealist filmmakers can be credited with pioneering this long-take aesthetic at the end of the war, depicting the uncertain, meandering journeys of characters through chaotic cities devastated by fighting or in the process of reconstruction. In the following decades, other European filmmakers would continue to adopt this approach, exploring it in original ways and in relation to different subjects. The qualities of the modern long-take aesthetic in post-war European cinema can be conceived in relation to different

theoretical frameworks, specifically those of realism, temporality and narrative dedramatisation, which will form the structure of my investigation in the chapters that follow.

At the same time, other post-war European filmmakers would continue to use the long take towards more dramatic ends, which were closer to the films of the pre-war directors cited, especially Renoir. For example, in his French films of the 1950s, Max Ophüls employs a highly mobile long-take style in which the continuous movement of the camera becomes a central element of the narrative and dramatic construction. As Lutz Bacher notes, these ‘rhythmic’ long takes ‘contribute to the meanings and moods of scenes by the rhythms they engender ... and the *juxtaposition* of the moving subject with elements of the setting or *other* moving subjects’ (Bacher 1996: 5). This can be observed in *La Ronde* (1950), which follows the characters in long takes as they move around and between the various locations of Vienna in 1900, where they meet briefly with other characters and then part again. Through his depiction of the events, Ophüls encourages our emotional involvement with these people as we share their romantic encounters, while at the same time the long takes construct a sense of dramatic irony by revealing more to us than any of the individuals can see or know. The film stresses the interconnecting and overlapping lives of the characters through the mobile camera, as each embarks on a brief love affair with the next that creates the circular chain named in the film’s title. The continuity between the different episodes is emphasised through the visual unity of space and time in the long take and the relationships or juxtapositions it creates between details within the shot. A similar pattern is also found in *Madame de...* (1953), where Ophüls’s mobile long takes are used to depict the circulation of the title protagonist’s earrings between

various characters, building a dramatically ironic scenario once more around their interconnected and overlapping romantic lives.

Another example of this more dramatic use of the long take in post-war European cinema can be found in the films of Jacques Tati, such as *Mon Oncle* (1958). Here, static deep-focus shots are employed, in which Tati demonstrates a masterful control over the elements of *mise en scène* and their precise timing for comedic effect. Humour is achieved primarily through the relations or juxtapositions between different features within a single space, and especially in the tension between foreground and background action. This is demonstrated, for example, in the repeated gag where characters hiding in the foreground attempt to distract those walking along the street in the background so that they bump into a lamppost. Moreover, in the garden party episode of the film, Tati constructs an abundance of hilarious moments through the long take by juxtaposing the stiff manner of the middle class hosts and their neighbours with the protagonist, Monsieur Hulot's (Tati), attempts to negotiate the ridiculously designed spaces of the modernist villa. We observe a string of calamities as he ruins a minimalist plant feature, punctures a water pipe to the prized fountain, walks into a pond and generally struggles to follow the designated pathways of the landscaped garden. The long take is therefore used in the film to build these narrative events in visual terms and to involve (and implicate) the spectator in Hulot's awkward or embarrassing situations, which all reflect the comedic absurdity of modern, consumerist French society.

In Eastern Europe, also, some filmmakers of the period turned to the long take for the purposes of dramatic construction. Most notably, in his 1950s 'war trilogy', Andrzej Wajda uses the technique to commemorate the turbulent historical events in Poland during and following World War II. In *Ashes and Diamonds* (*Popiół i*

diament, 1958), for example, Wajda depicts the struggle for power between communists and nationalist fighters in the wake of Germany's surrender. The film builds a dramatic web between the characters, tracing their physical and political movements, their alliances and oppositions, as the assassination of a leading communist is planned. This is reflected visually through the arrangement of figures in the long take, which is demonstrated especially in the scenes set in the communal spaces of the hotel where much of the film takes place, and where the various characters frequently congregate. Wajda also uses the long take to create symbolic associations between characters and elements of the setting at certain moments in the film. For example, when the protagonist Maciek (Zbigniew Cybulski) and his newly acquainted lover Krystyna (Ewa Krzyzewska) shelter in a bombed-out church they are composed beside a figure of the crucifixion, hanging upside-down from the ceiling. As Maciek speaks of his desire for a normal life, the fallen Christ figure divides them on opposite sides of the screen, which symbolically anticipates his failed act of heroism in the final assassination that will ultimately prevent his civilian life with Krystyna, when he is fatally shot by Soviet troops. Moreover, in addition to these dramatic associations within the frame, Wajda also utilises the long take to emphasise Maciek's/Cybulski's charismatic performance, and to encourage our interest and involvement with his dilemma between the final act of political commitment or personal redemption.

While these post-war European filmmakers are notable practitioners of the long take, their works do not fit my own category of modern European cinema, which is influenced particularly by the groupings shared by writers such as Deleuze, Bordwell and Kovács. The dramatic approaches to the long take that are employed by Ophüls, Tati and Wajda, where significant narrative relations are built up through the

extended shot, and which involve us closely with the characters and their scenarios, is the opposite to the effect created by the filmmakers of interest in this thesis. Instead, as my earlier comments indicate, modern cinema exploits the potential of the long take to make the events more ambiguous and unstable, and to slow down time so that our experience becomes separate from the development of the narrative. Rather than involving us psychologically and emotionally with the characters we are held back, and the fiction is notably dedramatised by traditional narrative standards. This subsequently opens up the possibility for such filmmakers to explore other qualities of the film image and its representation of the world. My aim in the following chapters will therefore be to question what modern European filmmakers are able to achieve through their use of the long take, and how this shapes our relation to the films and the events they depict.

Outline of Thesis

This thesis is divided into two broad groupings. Chapters one, three and five are largely historical and theoretical in their focus, centring on a particular conceptual dimension of the long take and its development over time. Chapters two, four and six, on the other hand, are more critical, focusing on one or two films, in particular, to examine their use of the long take in the light of the ideas presented in the previous chapter. This is not to say, however, that the first grouping of chapters do not engage critically with particular films. In fact, these chapters draw on close analysis of particular scenes in order to investigate the theoretical ideas proposed, and how they emerge in concrete examples. Likewise, the other group of chapters retain a firm conceptual basis guiding their observations and specific criticism will often be placed in relation to the wider stylistic patterns of the period.

Chapter one focuses on the issue of realism, revolving around Bazin's ideas outlined in various critical articles in the 1940s and 1950s. It will look closely at his response to Orson Welles's use of the long take as it is here that Bazin develops his theories about the technique most fully. The chapter considers notions about wholeness, perceptual freedom and ambiguity that Bazin argues are central to the realist aesthetic of the long take. It will then chart this realist emphasis in the long take, analysing the Florence episode from Roberto Rossellini's *Paisà* (1946), an important neorealist example, and its influence on subsequent modern European filmmakers. This will be seen in some examples from Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (*À bout de souffle*, 1960) in particular. In chapter two these ideas about realism in the long take will be examined in greater detail by looking at a particular film, Michelangelo Antonioni's *Cronaca di un amore* (*Story of a Love Affair*, 1950), seeing how Antonioni extends the neorealist aesthetic of the long take, utilising deep focus in the shot and camera movement to place the characters firmly in relation to their surrounding environment. And we shall see how Antonioni employs the long take's realist qualities of wholeness and ambiguity in relation to his concerns with the psychological state of the central characters. My analysis in this chapter will also examine how Antonioni challenges Bazinian notions of realism in the long take through an equally prominent interest in formal abstraction, reflected through composition and camera movement. I argue that this marks a dialectic between realism and formal abstraction in the long take, which becomes typical of the period following neorealism.

Chapter three turns to the issue of time, focusing on Deleuze's observations in his books on cinema. It will consider how Deleuze revises Bazin's response to Welles's use of the deep-focus long take to show that it marks a concern with

duration. For Deleuze, the prominence of time is fully established with neorealism, however, which marks a crisis of action and a turn to purely optical and sound situations where duration becomes most pressing. The chapter will consider how these ideas are reflected through the long take and it will take as its main example the famous scene of the maid in the kitchen from Vittorio De Sica's *Umberto D*, which has attracted much attention around its reduction of action and emphasis on time. I will then examine how filmmakers following neorealism have extended and adapted the concern with time, together with a more radical deployment of the long take, focusing on a comparable kitchen scene from Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975). Similarly, I will consider how critics have further developed Deleuze's temporal observations, taking them in new directions, and the implications of these other ideas about time in the long take specifically. The temporal emphasis of the long take will be further examined in chapter four by analysing Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979) in close detail. We shall see how the film reflects the broad ideas outlined by Deleuze, which also relate closely to Tarkovsky's own theoretical reflections on time in the cinema. Building on the observations of existing critical responses to Tarkovsky's use of the long take, this chapter will identify the particular strategies that Tarkovsky employs to make time a significant presence in the shot. Furthermore, I shall consider to what purposes Tarkovsky employs his temporal aesthetic, noting in particular the unusual and interesting tension between mysticism and an emphasis on material texture in the film. My observations therefore aim to solidify the importance of time in the long take and to provide further detail on the aesthetic possibilities opened up to filmmakers by employing duration in the shot.

In chapter five I will focus on issues of narrative, considering Bordwell's arguments about 'art-cinema narration' and dedramatisation. Bordwell's narrative approach to modern European cinema marks a distinction from the more ontological concerns that bind Bazin's and Deleuze's reflections. However, I shall demonstrate that Bordwell, in fact, brings out some of the underlying narrative implications in the writing of the previous critics. The chapter shall consider how the features of 'art-cinema narration' that Bordwell discusses can be observed in the long take specifically, and through the features of wholeness and duration that Bazin and Deleuze suggest as its defining features. We shall then consider Bordwell's own discussions about the long take itself and how it promotes dedramatisation in its organisation of space and time through staging and composition. This chapter will focus on one example, looking at Bordwell's examination of Theo Angelopoulos's films and elaborating on his observations through close analysis of a particular scene from *The Travelling Players* (*O Thiassos*, 1975). I shall also consider some of the limitations of Bordwell's notion of dedramatisation by examining the ways in which the long take has been considered to foster a heightened sense of visual drama despite its reduction of narrative drama, referring especially to Andrew Klevan's notions about 'the melodrama of time' in the long take. Finally, in chapter six, we shall explore these ideas further by looking at two films by Miklós Jancsó: *The Round-Up* (*Szegénylegények*, 1965) and *The Red and the White* (*Csillagosok, katonák*, 1967). Through close description of numerous examples from these films, the chapter will consider how Jancsó builds these films out of the visual patterns of staging, composition and camera movement in the long take. But my analysis will also focus on how these films utilise this dedramatised form in relation to concepts of political power that constitute the thematic basis of Jancsó's filmmaking. Through the

arrangement and movement of figures within the continuous space and time of the long take, Jancsó reflects on the abstract processes of oppression and revolution.

The films discussed in this thesis have been chosen because they represent exemplary cases of the long-take tradition in modern European cinema. This has been judged on the basis of various criteria: the degree to which the filmmakers employ the long take, the centrality of the technique in their overall style, the extent to which they demonstrate the theoretical issues associated with the technique, and the prominent attention they have received in the existing scholarship related to the long take in modern European cinema. Although the filmmakers in question have been selected primarily due to their use of the long take, they also represent some of the most canonical names of the period. Rossellini and De Sica, for example, are widely considered to be leading figures of neorealism. Antonioni and Godard became two of the most highly influential filmmakers in modern Italian and French cinema in the following decades, while Jancsó and Tarkovsky also became central filmmakers of the Eastern European new waves of the period. The long take is not a necessarily ubiquitous phenomenon existing throughout all films of the period. Nonetheless, the technique does form an important aesthetic feature that is typical of some of the most important works of modern European cinema. Therefore, in the following chapters, this thesis intends to explore the long take from various perspectives and through numerous examples in order to come to a fuller understanding of how filmmakers utilised the technique during the period. My purpose is to show that the long take forms one essential part of the project of modern European cinema from the late 1940s to the end of the 1970s, and is central to the achievements of many important filmmakers during these decades, filmmakers whose work continues to inspire critical reflection forty years later.

CHAPTER ONE:

WHOLENESS, AMBIGUITY AND REALISM

‘Whether an episode is analyzed bit by bit or presented in its physical entirety cannot surely remain a matter of indifference, at least in a work with some pretensions to style’ (André Bazin 1967: 35)

This chapter will focus on the issue of realism in the long take, revolving around the ideas of the French film critic and theorist André Bazin. Bazin’s critical writings from the mid-1940s until his death in 1958 provide an important theoretical precursor to the development of the long take in modern European cinema during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. His ideas about realist aesthetics in the cinema, which he developed in relation to the films of Orson Welles and the Italian neorealists in the 1940s, remains an influential theory of the long take, despite preceding the work of most of the filmmakers explored in this thesis, who would utilise the technique to an even greater extent than their predecessors. As Bazin’s writing forms the earliest response to the developments in long-take filmmaking in post-war Europe it seems appropriate to begin my theoretical and historical survey here. In recent years there has been a wave of resurgent interest in Bazin’s ideas within film theory.¹ However, my focus will be targeted specifically at Bazin’s comments on the long take, or those that have a close bearing on our understanding of the technique, as well as his historical outlook. But it will be helpful to first begin with Bazin’s observations on the practice from which the long take marks a significant aesthetic and historical break: classical analytical editing.

¹ For example, see: Philip Rosen’s *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (2001), Daniel Morgan’s ‘Rethinking Bazin: Ontology and Realist Aesthetics’ (2006), the Bazin special issue of *Film International* (2007), and the collection *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and its Afterlife*, edited by Dudley Andrew (2011). I shall refer to several of these studies in my discussions here and in later chapters.

Analytical Editing and Classical Dramatic Construction

Bazin observes that analytical editing, which was epitomised by Hollywood filmmaking during the studio era, brought narrative sound cinema to ‘a level of classical perfection’, both dramatically and technically, by the 1930s.² The method works to break the scene down into a series of shots that isolate various elements of the *mise en scène* while maintaining the impression of spatial and temporal continuity. In ‘The Evolution of the Language of Cinema’, Bazin writes that analytical editing is based on two principles: ‘the verisimilitude of space in which the position of the actor is always determined, even when a close-up eliminates the decor’ and ‘the purpose and the effects of the cutting are exclusively dramatic or psychological’ (Bazin 1967: 31-32). The selection of shots emphasises significant details by focusing attention where it is necessary (based on the dramatic logic of the scene) while excluding any superfluous details that might distract from what is most dramatically important. Although the editing fragments the action, Bazin suggests that the logic of the cutting ‘conceals the fact of analysis’ and ‘the mind of the spectator quite naturally accept[s] the viewpoints of the director which are justified by the geography of the action or the shifting emphasis of dramatic interest’ (Bazin 1967: 24). Furthermore, we accept it as a continuous unfolding because this process approximates our natural tendencies of perception in the world; ordinarily, our attention is focused on particular details within the surrounding environment.

In ‘An Aesthetic of Reality: Neorealism’, Bazin takes as an example of these general ideas about analytical editing the hypothetical situation of a prisoner waiting in his cell to be executed. He notes that ‘at the moment the executioner is about to

² See Bazin’s two major essays, ‘The Evolution of the Language of Cinema’ (a composite of three essays published in 1950, 1952 and 1955) and ‘An Aesthetic of Reality: Neorealism’ (originally published in 1948), collected in the two-volume English translation of *What is Cinema?* (1967 and 1971).

enter we can be quite sure that the director will cut to a close shot of the door handle as it slowly turns' (Bazin 1971: 28). The cut to the door handle appears logical, focusing on the particular site of action within the scene and indicating this development (the arrival of the executioner) with clarity. The shot also emphasises the dramatic significance of the action; it is a point-of-view shot, approximating the perspective of the prisoner and signalling his attention. Bazin writes: 'the close-up is justified psychologically by the victim's concentration on the symbol of his extreme distress' (Bazin 1971: 28). Building on Bazin's comments we might assume that the close-up would be placed between two shots of the prisoner looking towards the door, the first as he notices the door handle turning and the second, following the close-up of the handle, showing his reaction. Thus, the editing works to analyse the action, focusing on the most significant details and connecting them together in a way that establishes an impression of continuity across the individual shots and the spatial verisimilitude of the wider space of the scene.

These largely theoretical observations on analytical editing that Bazin puts forward can be considered further by looking more closely at a particular example. The well-known Hollywood crime film *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941) provides an exemplary case study of conventional analytical editing.³ Throughout the film, cutting and camera movement are geared firmly towards the analysis of action, based on the dramatic logic of the events, while also maintaining the sense of spatial continuity across individual shots. This is demonstrated, for example, in the scene where the film's protagonist Samuel Spade (Humphrey Bogart) first comes across the

³ This is reflected by the fact that David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson take a scene from *The Maltese Falcon* as the prime example in their discussion of classical editing in their textbook *Film Art: An Introduction* (Bordwell and Thompson 1996: 287-293). The scene they discuss is set in the same space as the scene I shall now discuss (the protagonist's office) and, although the scenes are different, Bordwell and Thompson's observations are helpful in relation to my particular example.

criminal Joel Cairo (Peter Lorre) at his office. The scene is especially significant as it introduces the mystery of the ornamental bird named in the film's title, which will motivate the following developments in the narrative.

The scene starts with a long shot that picks up Spade entering his office from the waiting room, where he asked his secretary Effie (Lee Patrick) to call his lawyer. The camera then tracks across the office, following Spade to his desk, and settles on a medium shot as he sits down, starts to roll a cigarette and answers the telephone. By tracking across the room in this first shot, the camera not only focuses on Spade as the centre of interest (he is the only person in the room at this moment), but also helps to establish the overall space of the office. The shot allows us to become familiar with the geography of the room and to place the different elements of the *mise en scène* in relation to each other. In particular, the spatial relations between the door and Spade's desk on the far side of the room are clarified. The next shot performs a similar function by cutting to a reverse angle that presents a long shot of the office from the other side, with Spade's back framed on the far side of the shot as he sits at his desk speaking to the lawyer. This further establishes the setting, as Bordwell and Thompson note, 'delineating the overall space of the office: the door, the intervening area, the desk, and Spade's position' (Bordwell and Thompson 1996: 288), which becomes important for retaining a sense of spatial stability when the scene is divided in the shots that follow. In these subsequent shots, spatial relations are further maintained through eye-line matches where the characters' gazes meet when they look out of the frame. And this is supported by a shot/reverse-shot pattern, cutting between them to reinforce their spatial proximity.⁴

⁴ For Bordwell and Thompson's discussion of eye-line matches and shot/reverse-shot editing in the film see *Film Art: An Introduction* (Bordwell and Thompson 1996: 289).

The editing between shots in the scene revolves primarily around the dramatic logic of the action. The cut to the scene's second shot not only establishes the space of the office, but is also motivated by Effie's entrance, directing our attention to her as she arrives and presents Spade with Cairo's name card. Bordwell and Thompson point out that 'the space near the door has been shown when the cause-effect chain makes it important, not before' (Bordwell and Thompson 1996: 290). As she approaches the desk, the shot allows us to observe the manner in which she presents the card to Spade. Effie leans over the desk with it between her fingers and pauses, looking at him with raised eyebrows and a slight smirk. The film's attention to Effie at this moment indicates that her entrance is of notable interest and not merely a casual, background action (such as filing away documents or other menial office chores). The film then cuts to a reverse shot to focus on Spade's reaction to the card. He is intrigued by the object and, noticing that it is perfumed, he immediately looks up and off-screen towards Effie in surprise. At this point the film cuts back to Effie to show her own response to Spade's reaction.⁵ When Effie then shows Cairo into the office, the film cuts to a forward tracking shot, moving into a close-up of Spade's facial reaction. This conspicuous camera movement highlights Spade's intrigue in seeing Cairo for the first time and conveys the importance of the man's arrival at this point in the film. The shot/reverse-shot editing demonstrated here therefore focuses on the exchange of reactions to Cairo's arrival, which forms the dramatic focal point of the scene.

Analytical editing in *The Maltese Falcon* is also frequently structured around Spade's own analysis of the space around him. As a detective, he is constantly investigating his environment and focusing on the details that appear most significant.

⁵ This cut also highlights, particularly clearly, the scene's reliance on eye-line matches to establish continuity across shots.

William Luhr points out that ‘one of his basic characteristics is a remarkable analytical intelligence’, and he notes that ‘many shots in the film simply show him watching, taking it all in, with little indication of his response. The film carefully develops in the viewer the sense that Spade understands virtually everything in complex ways’ (Luhr 1996: 168). This is most often achieved through the film’s use of editing, and it becomes apparent in the scene at the office. Following their initial conversation, Cairo pulls a gun on Spade but he is overpowered and knocked unconscious by the film’s hero. Spade then immediately proceeds to search Cairo’s pockets for information about the man. He removes some items from Cairo’s jacket: a silver cigarette case and some booklets. At this point, the film cuts to another shot showing Spade from closer-up looking at the booklets. The shot draws attention to Spade’s examination of the documents and also shows more detail than could be seen in the previous shot, revealing that they are official documents. The film then cuts to a big close-up of the booklets, clarifying what they are: passports from different nationalities that all belong to Cairo. The film’s focus on these details in close-up is justified by Spade’s own concentration on the documents and the shot approximates his point of view. Just as he isolates these particular details from the wider space of the scene, so too does the film through its editing. In such moments our assimilation of dramatic information (e.g. the murky identity of the criminal) through the editing is motivated by, and aligned with, Spade’s own discoveries.

The dramatic logic that underpins the editing in this scene, and throughout the film, is further reflected on the level of thematic and metaphorical meaning. The cutting works in conjunction with performance and other elements of the *mise en scène* to construct a contrast between Spade as the hero and Cairo as the criminal. In particular, the film demonstrates a notable opposition between the heterosexual

masculinity of the hero and the deviant homosexuality of the villain, which Richard Dyer argues is a trait of the Hollywood film noir.⁶ Following Dyer, Frank Krutnik also notes that ‘Spade’s mastery is thus explicitly linked with the triumph of “tough” masculinity over a deviant/effeminate adversary’ (Krutnik 1991: 95). And James Naremore, in his discussion of the film, echoes these critical observations, stating that ‘everything in the film is designed to emphasize a vivid contrast between the “masculine” ethos of Spade and the “femininity” of the villains’ (Naremore 1998: 60). This becomes particularly evident in the office scene during the discussion between Spade and Cairo, which precedes the confrontation with the pistol. The editing juxtaposes Spade with Cairo in single shots, which focuses on the contrasting mannerisms of the two men. Firstly, the camera follows Cairo in a medium shot when he enters the office and moves to the desk, focusing on his figure and his actions. He is immaculately presented, dressed in a fine-tailored suit and bowtie with white gloves and a walking stick.⁷ Cairo then gently places down his hat and lays one of the gloves delicately over the top. When Cairo sits down, he is framed from closer up, which draws attention to certain details of his behaviour. As he speaks, Cairo fiddles with his walking stick, softly stroking it with his finger and then caressing the phallic handle with his mouth. These details, which the film isolates and emphasises through the editing, quite clearly mark Cairo’s deviation from the heterosexual masculine norms that the film associates with Spade.

The opposition between Cairo and Spade is also made apparent by the reverse shots of Spade that reveal his very different manner. He sits casually in his chair,

⁶ See ‘Homosexuality and Film Noir’ (Dyer 1977: 18-21).

⁷ Dyer points out that ‘fastidious dress’ and immaculate grooming are recurring motifs of homosexuality in film noir, citing Cairo as one particular example. He also notes that the association of gay men with luxury and decadence is another important feature of film noir iconography (Dyer 1977: 20).

slightly slumped, and his clothing is not ornate or slim-tailored like Cairo's. As Dyer writes of the film noir protagonist in general, 'it is the imagery of hard-boiledness that prevails – with unpressed suits, ties loosened at the neck, low drawn hats and unshaven faces. This bespeaks the heroes' lack of concern about their appearance' (Dyer 1977: 19-20). Spade is also very still, in contrast to Cairo's fidgety state, watching the man silently and sternly as he smokes a cigarette. The details of the two characters' performances would, of course, still be present if the scene was not broken down into separate shots. However, by employing analytical editing, the thematic contrast between the two men becomes a central feature shaping the presentation of the action, and this marks another way that the editing works to analyse the scene according to the requirements of its dramatic logic.

This example from *The Maltese Falcon* thus reflects the qualities that Bazin identifies in his above comments about analytical editing. Throughout the sequence, spatial verisimilitude is maintained so that we are always aware of the positioning of the individual shots in relation to the wider space of the office. The purpose of the editing between shots is, as Bazin suggests, built primarily on the dramatic and psychological significance of the action. The use of shot/reverse-shot focuses attention on important details of performance and *mise en scène*, which communicate narrative information clearly and efficiently, and the film's attention to important narrative information is also built around Spade's own investigative analysis of his surrounding space, employing the close-up and point-of-view shot. Furthermore, the editing is motivated by underlying thematic ideas, notably the opposition between Spade's tough masculinity and Cairo's effeminate homosexuality, which also constitutes a significant part of the film's dramatic construction. Because it maintains the impression of spatial continuity and is entirely logical in its selection of shots,

Bazin notes that analytical editing appears largely ‘invisible’, and therefore establishes a film form appropriately suited to the structures of classical narrative.⁸ It was this practice, and its resultant implications, however, which Bazin found was challenged during and after the war with the introduction of the long take.

The Long Take, Photographic Ontology and Realist Aesthetics

Bazin developed much of his thinking about the long take in relation to Orson Welles’s first two films, *Citizen Kane* (1941) and *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), especially in his 1958 book on the director and the two articles already cited.⁹ As Bazin’s ideas about the long take are most elaborated in relation to Welles, and because Welles’s films form an important theoretical precursor to the cinematic developments of the post-war period examined in this thesis, it will be beneficial to begin here, before moving on to examine the advent of modern European cinema itself, with Italian neorealism.

Welles’s *Citizen Kane* is remarkable for Bazin because it consistently refuses to break the scenes down into multiple shots that analyse the action. Instead, the film reverts to composition in depth, with all the action and the entirety of the setting maintained in a single shot, ‘so that Welles’ *découpage* in deep focus ultimately tends to absorb the concept of “shots” in a *découpage* unit which might be called the sequence shot’ (Bazin 1991: 78). Bazin’s prime example is the famous scene where Susan (Dorothy Comingore) attempts to commit suicide by overdosing on sleeping pills in order to end the tortuous singing career enforced on her by her husband, the film’s enigmatic protagonist, Charles Foster Kane (Welles). In this scene, the camera frames the entirety of the room in a single shot, with an empty glass and spoon beside

⁸ See ‘The Evolution of the Language of Cinema’ (Bazin 1967: 24, 28-31).

⁹ See the English translation of *Orson Welles: A Critical View* (Bazin 1991: 64-82).

a medicine bottle in the close foreground, behind which Susan's head lies in shadow and in the background is the locked door. As Susan lies in a semi-conscious state in her bed, breathing heavily, Kane starts banging on the other side of the door. Eventually he breaks into the room, discovering Susan's condition and calls for the doctor.



Fig. 1.1 *Citizen Kane* (1941)

Bazin notes that the arrangement of elements within the depth of the shot – the bottle and glass in the foreground, Susan's heavy breathing and the knocking on the door – conveys the narrative situation that Susan has locked herself in her bedroom and taken an overdose, while Kane is trying to get to her. And he also points out that the dramatic structure of the scene is built on the relations between these various elements maintained within a single shot, especially between Susan in the foreground and Kane behind the door in the background. Bazin writes that 'a tension is

established between these two poles, which are kept at a distance from each other by the deep focus', and when Kane breaks into the room to discover Susan, 'the spark has been ignited between the two dramatic poles of the image. The scene is over' (Bazin 1991: 78). He suggests that, with analytical editing, the scene would be broken down into numerous shots focusing on the different elements: a close-up of the glass and bottle, a shot of Susan's face and then of Kane behind the door, crosscutting back and forth to build suspense, and when Kane finally breaks into the room a shot of him approaching the bed, followed by a close-up of his reaction as he leans over Susan to end the scene.¹⁰ If the scene were handled in this manner the dramatic situation depicted would be equally apparent, though it would be achieved by cutting between the various elements, rather than their arrangement within a single space. Furthermore, the tension that Bazin identifies between Susan's location and Kane's would also remain central to the scene, though again, achieved instead through the cutting. However, Bazin insists that something significant would be lost if Welles had resorted to analytical editing. As Dudley Andrew writes: 'Welles's revolution in the filming of key scenes was more than a merely stylistic innovation. It signalled a basic change in the conception of the filmed event and of the spectator for whom that event was filmed' (Andrew 2013: 120). Bazin emphasises that by handling the scene with the deep-focus long take, Welles preserves 'the continuum of reality' in the scene; he is able to achieve a fundamental aesthetic of realism that is intimately bound with the cinema's inherent nature and the experience it provides.

Bazin's arguments about the realism of the long take are grounded in his observations on cinema's photographic ontology, which Bazin outlines in his seminal essay 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' (originally published in 1945). The

¹⁰ See *Orson Welles* (Bazin 1991: 78).

unique quality of the photographic image, Bazin points out, is its essentially objective nature; it is formed automatically by the mechanism of the camera, which removes the intervention of human manipulation in the creation of the image. Photographers (and by extension, filmmakers) can choose what to photograph and the position of the camera in relation to its subject, but they are limited in the degree to which they can shape the image. It is this limitation, guaranteed by the camera's impassive recording of whatever stands before it, which Bazin sees as photography's major advantage.¹¹ Where painters had pursued increased accuracy in their representation of people and things, they were unable to achieve the authenticity of photography, due to its mechanical objectivity. Bazin writes:

In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually *re-presented*, set before us, that is to say, in time and space. Photography enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of this transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction. (Bazin 1967: 13-14)

The cinema marks a further development of photography's inherent bond with reality by introducing the fundamental dimensions of movement and time, and this is central to filmic ontology:

The cinema is objectivity in time. The film is no longer content to preserve the object, enshrouded as it were in an instant ... Now, for the first time, the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it were. (Bazin 1967: 14-15)

Thus, Bazin concludes that cinema's unique and defining feature is its ability to capture an objective image of physical reality, taking place in both space and time. The long take gains its realism precisely from this ontological possibility by maintaining the concrete spatio-temporal relations between things, which the medium is uniquely able to deliver through its photographic basis.

¹¹ See 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' (Bazin 1967: 12-13).

Bazin argues that by breaking a scene down into its various parts and then reconstructing it through analytical editing the action 'is enveloped in abstraction' (Bazin 1971: 36). What Bazin means by abstraction is that the scene is shaped to fit a particular preconceived idea, or, as he writes: 'the creation of a sense or meaning not objectively contained in the images themselves but derived exclusively from their juxtaposition' (Bazin 1967: 25). In other words, analytical editing manipulates the real spatial and temporal relations between the elements in a scene and constructs specific relations that are, or at least could be, imposed on the action through the cutting. This is evident in the example from *The Maltese Falcon*, discussed in the previous section of this chapter, where the use of shot/reverse-shot shapes the film's presentation of the characters' interactions rather than objectively presenting their physical relations throughout the scene in a single shot. The cutting not only focuses on particular details at the expense of others in the scene, but is also motivated by a particular dramatic interpretation, namely, Cairo's effeminacy. It is around this idea that the action is shaped, and links or contrasts are created, by the cutting. V. F. Perkins, in a chapter on the long take in his study of Welles's *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1999), comes across some of the same issues raised by Bazin in his comments on Welles. Perkins similarly identifies the inherent ability of the editing to manipulate the action, and he summarises this idea very well, arguing that:

In edited sequences quite a lot of the interaction is constructed at the cutting bench, maybe or maybe not in mimicry of the interactions laid down in a master shot; it is easy to hasten or retard movements, to extend or shorten pauses, to build or subdue reactions, so that the relationships projected on the film are those put together in the editing room and may never have been observed by the apparatus. (Perkins 1999: 66)

It is this loss of real continuity, and the subsequent creation of amplified or false relations, which Bazin recognises as a significant consequence of analytical editing and its inherent potential for abstraction.

By contrast, Bazin observes, Welles's composition in depth restores the physical unfolding of the action and absorbs 'the implicit relations, which the *découpage* no longer displays on the screen like the pieces of a dismantled engine' (Bazin 1991: 80). The technique is consequently more realistic because it draws on the medium's ontological potential to capture the genuine modulations of the characters' (or, perhaps more accurately, the actors') existence and their behaviour over the course of the scene. As Perkins suggests, 'doing without the rhythms of editing within scenes requires the shape and pulse of the action to be found in performance', and he indicates that 'the characters' experience of change, of simultaneity and succession, convergence and separation, anticipation, process and consequence is made more dependent on the being and doing of the actors' (Perkins 1999: 65). This respect for the integrity of the performances becomes apparent in Bazin's other main example of Welles's deep-focus long take, the famous scene from *The Magnificent Ambersons* where Fanny (Agnes Moorehead) and George (Tim Holt) speak in the kitchen of the family mansion. George has just returned home after a train journey and greedily consumes the cake that Fanny has made for him, while she subtly attempts to find out if George and his mother Isabel (Dolores Costello) had met Eugene Morgan (Joseph Cotten), with whom she is secretly in love. She slowly learns that Eugene had accompanied them on the train journey home and when George begins to tease her about Eugene proposing to her, Fanny breaks down and leaves the room.



Fig 1.2 *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942)

In his discussion of the kitchen scene, Bazin argues that the drama is built on a tension between the ‘pretext action’, George greedily eating the cake, and the ‘real action’, Fanny’s suppressed anxiety. The scene is played in a single shot where the distinction between the ‘pretext action’ and the ‘real action’ is determined entirely by the unfolding performances of the actors. Bazin argues that the dramatic tension is ‘created from moment to moment, between the real feelings of the protagonists and their outward behaviour’, which imposes a ‘weighty objectivity’ on the scene (Bazin 1991: 72). With analytical editing, Bazin suggests, the scene would be split into numerous shots emphasising the distinction between the two actions, with close-ups of Fanny when she utters the few lines of dialogue that allow insight into her psychology.¹² But doing this would disturb the real continuity of the action. By

¹² See *Orson Welles* (Bazin 1991: 72).

utilising the long take, Welles preserves the totality of the performance, which, Bazin argues, not only conveys the smoothly ascending tension of the drama more effectively, but also respects the integral realism of the action. Furthermore, Bazin states that the totality Welles preserves through his use of the deep-focus long take includes not only the performances, but extends to incorporate all the elements of the scene. Welles therefore establishes ‘a realism that is in a certain sense ontological, restoring to the object and the décor their existential density, the weight of their presence’, and he also maintains ‘a dramatic realism which refuses to separate the actor from the décor, the foreground from the background ... [in a] “realistic” *mise en scène*, proceeding by “sequence shots” seized by the camera as blocks of reality’ (Bazin 1991: 80).

One criticism of Bazin’s arguments about the realism of the long take, however, is that they do not appear to account for the possibility of manipulation and abstraction within the shot. In *A Critique of Film Theory* (1980), Brian Henderson criticises what he sees as the dogmatic relationship between the long take and realism in Bazin’s thinking. He argues that ‘Bazin associates reality with the long take, but he also associates the long take with reality. There is a reciprocal relationship between them and, even more important, that relationship is fixed, permanent’ (Henderson 1980: 9). Henderson is critical of Bazin’s position because it does not take account of the specificity of the individual shot, substituting particularity for general theoretical principles. Henderson writes:

When one drops the ontological baggage (and its aesthetic and historical extensions), the long take is *not* inherently realistic, ambiguous, and participatory. No kind of shot or sequence or whole filmic structure is inherently any of these. Such qualities depend upon the relation of the visual form to the content of the shot and upon the context of the shot, both visual and narrative. (Henderson 1980: 9-10)

Furthermore, in a discussion of Welles's composition in depth in *Citizen Kane*, more specifically, Naremore writes: 'deep focus can preserve what Bazin called the "continuum" of reality ... [allowing] the spectator the impression of looking into a "real" space ... but the information crowded on the screen has been as carefully manipulated as any montage' (Naremore 2004: 130). Naremore emphasises the fact that what is captured in the shot is not necessarily an autonomous event taking place before the camera, which the film gives us direct access to through the long take; the action may be (and often is) carefully arranged entirely for the benefit of the camera. His comments refer not only to Welles's precise control over the arrangement of *mise en scène* within the long take, but also to his cinematographer, Gregg Toland's, well-documented use of superimposition and matte-shots to achieve the heightened depth of field in scenes such as Susan's attempted suicide, which is actually a composite of separate shots that were subsequently merged onto a single frame in post-production.¹³ In such scenes, the long take does not refer to any integral reality before the camera but is instead a construct, and it could therefore be considered as much of an abstraction from physical reality as the edited sequence that Bazin opposes it to. Furthermore, even when the long take is achieved in a single shot without any technical manipulation, the more general issue regarding the distinction between the staging of the action and its existence in the final film remains a potential problem for Bazin's arguments about photographic ontology and realism.¹⁴

In his essay 'Rethinking Bazin: Ontology and Realist Aesthetics' (2006), Daniel Morgan provides a significant reconsideration of Bazin's ideas and he

¹³ For an extensive account of the cinematographic effects used in the production of *Citizen Kane* see Robert Carringer's book *The Making of Citizen Kane* (Carringer 1996: 81-94).

¹⁴ Although Perkins emphasises the way that the long take preserves the integrity of the performances in the scene he is also careful to note that 'the end product is nonetheless a work of art and artifice', due to the likelihood of post-synchronised sound and 'the constant shunting of items of decor into the camera's view or out of its path' (Perkins 1999: 65-66).

encounters the same problems outlined above. Morgan notes that Bazin's connection between realism and photographic ontology has encouraged the idea of *direct* realism, where the action presented in the film refers directly to the reality that existed before the camera. And he indicates that this explanation 'emphasizes specific styles – or at least understandings of these styles – that appear to refuse stylization (artifice) in favor of preserving the authentic look of the world' (Morgan 2006: 455). The long take initially seems to epitomise this idea about realism; it forms a film style that refuses the stylisation and artifice of editing and instead preserves the 'authentic look of the world' by rendering the physical relations between the elements in the space before the camera. However, this idea becomes immediately problematic, as reflected by Welles's use of superimposition within the long take, or the more general artifices of staging, which establish a distinction between the production of the shot and its presence in the film. This problem is encapsulated by the question that Morgan raises about 'how fictional worlds can be supported on film' if we accept that 'the image necessarily refers to what was in front of the camera', and he points out that, to be sustained, 'the world of a film needs to be separated from (the look of) the reality that caused it' (Morgan 2006: 455). The problem that Morgan outlines stems largely from Bazin's ambiguous critical language. He frequently refers to the 'reality' presented by the film, but does not explicitly account for the difference between the pro-filmic reality captured directly by the camera and the fictional world depicted within the film. In order for the long take to work in the ways that Bazin suggests, in his discussion of the two examples from Welles's films, it is imperative that we do not recognise the filmmakers' use of superimposition, or the technical processes of the staging, and that we only see the autonomous fictional reality existing on screen. But

in doing so, the realism of the long take must be understood on different terms to that of a direct relationship between the shot and the pro-filmic reality before the camera.

Morgan indicates that a more compelling understanding of Bazin's comments is based on what he calls *perceptual* or *psychological* realism. He takes the example of Welles's superimposition to exemplify the difference between this account and that of direct realism. Morgan argues that, in the sequence depicting Susan's attempted suicide, the fact that the long take is composed from separate shots merged together does not invalidate its realism because:

Bazin's interest in the shot – and its emotional power – has nothing to do with the faithful reproduction of a scene in front of the camera. His interest is in the effect the shot creates, which is based on an impression, but only an impression, of coherent space. (Morgan 2006: 456)

Realism here is based not on the direct correlation between the film and a precedent reality, but on the idea that the action in the film has the integrity, or as Bazin says, the 'existential density', of the ordinary world as we experience it. As Morgan puts it: 'a film's world, if it is to be sustained in the spectator's mind, must replicate the manner in which we experience our world' (Morgan 2006: 456). Morgan observes that this interpretation is grounded in phenomenological thinking, which puts perception and experience at the centre of our understanding about the world. Perceptual realism is central to the long take, especially when it is combined with deep focus, because it provides the impression of an integral reality on screen rather than the fragmented, constructed space of analytical editing. Subsequently this allows an experience of the film that more closely replicates our position in the world.¹⁵

The perceptual realism of the long take is still grounded in the medium's photographic ontology, which Bazin argues is central to cinematic realism. However,

¹⁵ See 'Rethinking Bazin' (Morgan 2006: 457).

the connection is not as rigid as that proposed by the idea of direct realism. Instead, the shot's aesthetic effect follows from the recognition that cinema has an ontological bond with physical reality. Morgan summarises this idea when he writes: 'because there is a direct connection between image and world', which is the result of cinema's photographic basis, 'a realist film must aim at the "normal" experience of the world' (Morgan 2006: 457). To put it another way, the film must give the impression of a direct photographic rendering of reality, even if this reality is essentially contrived and fictional. As Morgan writes: 'the world on the screen literally functions as reality', but importantly, 'for it to become our world, it has to allow us "normal" modes of perception and experience' (Morgan 2006: 458). Although analytical editing does emulate natural perception in a way, by focusing on particular details as we do in the world, it also differs significantly from our ordinary experience because the choices about what to observe are already determined for us. In reality, however, we have the freedom to choose what details to focus on within our environment.

Bazin argues that Welles's deep-focus long take more accurately emulates real experience by providing the scene in its entirety, allowing the spectator this freedom to direct their own attention. A fundamental consequence of this openness, Bazin suggests, is that the action retains a greater sense of ambiguity, which compels the spectator to determine its significance. He writes:

While analytical montage only calls for him to follow his guide, to let his attention follow along smoothly with that of the director who will choose what he should see, here he is called upon to exercise at least a minimum of personal choice. It is from his attention and his will that the meaning of the image in part derives. (Bazin 1967: 35-36)

If analytical editing is geared towards the clarity of understanding by allowing greater access to (or imposing) dramatic meaning, the long take presents 'the ontological ambivalence of reality directly, in the very structure of its appearances' (Bazin 1991:

80). Due to its objective, photographic nature, the cinema is able to capture what Bazin believes to be reality's fundamental quality of ambiguity. His belief in the ambiguity of reality is indebted to the philosophical thinking of phenomenology and existentialism, which emphasise the idea that existence precedes essence, and that the meaning of reality can only be deduced subsequently, through our perception of the world.¹⁶ Where analytical editing attempts to overcome this essential ambiguity by analysing the action, identifying the significant details and linking these together to give an inherent meaning to the reality depicted, the long take embraces the openness of the events, leaving us to decipher their significance.

The emphasis on perceptual freedom and ambiguity in the long take can be observed in the two sequences that Bazin takes as his main examples of Welles's long take. With Susan's suicide attempt in *Citizen Kane*, we are forced to recognise the bottles in the foreground, to notice her shadowy figure breathing heavily in the bed and to direct our attention to the door at the back of the room when Kane starts to knock. The film puts the responsibility onto the spectator to observe these details and to draw the links between them in order to deduce the nature of the situation as it takes place. The kitchen scene in *The Magnificent Ambersons* takes this emphasis on the spectator's own attention still further. The camera refuses to provide privileged access to the subtle details of Fanny's performance through close-ups; we are forced to identify the minute details of her behaviour, the way she delivers her dialogue and her comparison with George to uncover the 'real action' hidden behind the 'pretext action' in the moment-by-moment progression of the scene. Perkins also emphasises

¹⁶ Dudley Andrew, in his biography of Bazin, indicates that these philosophical ideas were particularly prominent amongst Parisian intellectuals in the post-war years, at the time Bazin was writing his film criticism. And he points out that Bazin's thinking on cinema was directly influenced by phenomenological and existentialist ideas about man's conception of the world. See *André Bazin: Revised Edition* (Andrew 2013: 98-100).

this point, arguing that ‘a vital aspect of Welles’ long-take practice is its refusal of the easy rhetoric of emotional and psychological exposure that analytical editing makes available’, and he notes that Welles avoids ‘an excessively easy confidence in the camera’s assertion of motive and undeclared feeling’ (Perkins 1999: 59). Bazin’s imagined treatment of these scenes employing analytical editing, by contrast, would assert the dramatic meanings through cutting and close-ups. Instead, the composition in depth leaves this for the spectator to deduce through their own observation and interpretation of the action.

However, the extent to which the long take and deep focus genuinely do allow perceptual freedom, and thus truly maintain ambiguity in the events, is another contentious aspect of Bazin’s thinking. Naremore is again critical of Bazin, arguing that, in fact, ‘*Kane* has a somewhat authoritarian effect on the visual level ... he keeps the actors and the audience under fairly rigid control’, and, Naremore goes on to note, ‘he designs his images quite rigidly, sometimes blacking out whole sections of the composition or guiding our attention with movement and frames within frames’ (Naremore 2004: 127-130). He points out that the shots are ‘meticulously organised’ to stress important details and that the staging is timed with ‘clockwork precision’ to make sure that these details become apparent at the appropriate moment.¹⁷ Looking at the scene depicting Susan’s suicide attempt in the light of these comments, it becomes apparent that the shot is constructed in such a way as to call our attention to different elements at particular moments. Firstly, the overall composition and lighting of the scene focuses our attention on the three central dramatic details. The large bottle and glass in the very foreground dominate the shot, encouraging the spectator to recognise these elements immediately. Susan’s figure, which looms behind the glass, is also a

¹⁷ See, as an example of these ideas, Naremore’s discussion of the famous boarding house scene in *Citizen Kane* (Naremore 2004: 125-127).

focal point of our perception; the dark shape contrasts with the more brightly lit object in the foreground and also obscures a notable section of the room behind. Finally, the door in the background stands central in the frame and is the most brightly lit section of the space, becoming the most dominant feature in this part of the shot's depth. Therefore, the careful composition of the scene is designed to direct our perspective from foreground to background and, as we scan the image in this way, the nature of the situation becomes apparent. Our attention is also directed to a great extent through the use of sound, which Bazin himself sees as central to the scene's aesthetic effect and its dramatic tension. Susan's heavy breathing in the foreground calls attention to her darkened figure behind the glass, and the increasingly loud knocking on the door also draws our attention firmly to that section of the shot. When Kane finally breaks through, he naturally becomes the focus of the shot, being the most active element in the space, and we are particularly drawn to his facial reaction by the lighting.

It is clear that the construction of the long take in this instance (as elsewhere in the film) does work in several ways to direct our perception and to focus on particular, significant details. Morgan summarises this argument in another essay, entitled 'Bazin's Modernism' (2013), before going on to defend Bazin: 'we are not really free to look as we please, since Welles uses stylistic elements to guide our look across the image so that we will look at the right thing at the right time', thus meaning that 'what initially appears to be freedom turns out to be another form of control' (Morgan 2013: 21). The implications of this argument are significant, and they seem to dissolve the fundamental distinction between analytical editing and the long take that Bazin proposes on the grounds of perceptual realism. According to this interpretation, the difference between the two techniques is one merely of stylistic choice; the filmmaker may choose to direct the attention of the spectator either by cutting between particular

elements or, instead, through the arrangement of *mise en scène*, performance, lighting and sound within the shot.

Nevertheless, Morgan suggests that it is ‘overly reductive’ to argue that, because stylistic features such as composition and sound might be used to guide our attention to certain parts of the image, this invalidates the perceptual realism that Bazin associates with the long take. As Morgan points out, Bazin claims that ‘a deep space aesthetic allows us to look at the world of a film in the way we look at the world around us. But it’s a mistake to assume that our looking in everyday life is wholly unstructured’ (Morgan 2013: 21). He points out that our looks are, in fact, guided and controlled in the world by various signals and signs, such as road crossings and traffic lights. But despite such signals being placed to guide our attention and our movements, we still have the freedom not to focus on them: ‘we *can* look elsewhere ... It’s just that then we risk getting hit by a car, or, in the case of Welles, missing salient details of the plot’ (Morgan 2013: 21). Thus, while the long take may be composed in such a way as to encourage our attention towards particular elements within the frame, by maintaining the integrity of the space it still allows us the freedom to choose what to observe; we are free to follow the compositional guides, but we are equally free to ignore them. For instance, rather than following the arrangement of the *mise en scène* from the glass and bottle in the foreground to Susan’s darkened figure, then to the door in the background as Kane breaks into the room, we can choose to remain focused on the bottle, examining the details on the label while the action continues to take place behind. We may also focus on other details in the space of the room, such as the various period decorations (the bedside lamp, the ornate headboard, the curtains and columns surrounding the door). Our ability to do this is ruled out by analytical editing, which selects only the significant

details for our attention and excludes the remainder of the space. But with the long take, this additional space, while it may be made less prominent than the main details, remains present and available to our attention.

Despite some of the difficulties posed by Welles's films to Bazin's theoretical insights about the realism of long take, his ideas still stand as a conception of the technique. Following indirectly from cinema's ontological basis, the fictional world is given a concrete density in the long take that is more closely aligned with the ordinary world than it is in analytical editing. As a result, the long take also allows us to experience events in a way that more closely approximates our being in the world, where we have the freedom to direct our attention towards different details within a space and where the meaning of things is not immediately given, but must be deduced through our own interpretive activities. This approach to the film image marks a fundamental distinction from analytical editing and its dramatically informed presentation of events. As Bazin observed, Welles's method was not an isolated incident, and instead it had more far-reaching historical consequences. Most importantly, the realist aesthetic brought about by the long take became a conspicuous approach in European cinema as it would develop in the post-war decades.

Wholeness and Ambiguity in Neorealism: *Paisà*

The revolution in realism that Bazin found with Welles's composition in depth was brought to full realisation after World War II with Italian neorealism. It was the work of these filmmakers that became the focus of much of Bazin's writing on cinematic realism in the 1940s and 1950s.¹⁸ And Bazin's emphasis on neorealism's profound

¹⁸ Neorealism is given particular prominence in 'The Evolution of the Language of Cinema' and, of course, in 'An Aesthetic of Reality'. But Bazin also wrote a significant number of articles dealing with individual neorealist filmmakers and films, and here much of his initial

realism has remained influential on film historians until now. Mark Shiel, for example, writes in his recent study of the period that: ‘the search for authentic human experience and interaction was a central preoccupation of neorealist cinema from the outset’ (Shiel 2006: 13). Though *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons* were made within the classical Hollywood system, they remained an anomaly. Welles’s long take did not mark a significant revolution in Hollywood film style in the early 1940s and analytical editing continued to be the standard practice for narrative filmmaking.¹⁹ Instead, it was in post-war Europe where the discoveries made by Welles were adopted and further developed, beginning with the films of Roberto Rossellini. Despite the geographic distance and diverse industrial contexts of these two filmmakers, Bazin saw that ‘Rossellini and Welles have, to all intents and purposes, the same basic aesthetic objective, the same aesthetic concept of realism’ (Bazin 1971: 39). Neorealism marked the beginnings of modern European cinema and from the outset one of its defining features was thus an emphasis on realism, brought about to a large extent by the adoption of the long take.

The emphasis on realism in the long take, which Bazin identifies in neorealism at the birth of modern European cinema, also marks a fundamental difference from the interwar modernist cinema of the silent period. Bazin argues that the films of the earlier modernists demonstrate an even more excessive form of abstraction than in classical narrative cinema. Where classical film seeks to disguise its construction by providing the impression of continuity, making style as ‘invisible’ as possible, the

reflection on cinematic realism and ontology is further elaborated. For a selection of these articles see *What is Cinema? Volume 2* (1971).

¹⁹ Some other isolated examples of Hollywood films extensively utilising deep focus and the long take around this time are Wyler’s *The Little Foxes* (1941) and *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), in which Toland was also the cinematographer. See ‘William Wyler, or the Jansenist of Directing’ (originally published in 1948) (Bazin 1997: 1-22). Hitchcock’s *Rope* (1948) is another prominent example employing the long take, together with a highly mobile camera.

silent filmmakers emphasised the abstract and constructed nature of their films. Indeed, following their predecessors in other art forms, it was through this overt display of abstraction that filmmakers attempted to develop a cinematic modernism. According to Bazin, these filmmakers ‘put their faith in the image ... everything that the representation on the screen adds to the object there represented’, which included the Expressionist exaggeration of *mise en scène* that ‘did every kind of violence to the plastics of the image by way of sets and lighting’ and, more importantly for Bazin, the use of montage, which ‘did not show us the event; it alluded to it ... the final significance of the film was found to reside in the ordering of [its] elements much more than in their objective content’ (Bazin 1967: 24-26). By contrast, as Bazin observes, neorealism’s development of a modern aesthetic after the war can be defined by its concern to capture the objective realism of events that constituted one inherent possibility of the medium, and which challenged classical cinema’s dramatic presentation of space and action through analytical editing.

Like Welles, Rossellini also demonstrates a rejection of analytical editing in favour of a style that aims to capture the physical integrity of the action. Bazin argues that, although Rossellini’s use of the long take is ‘less spectacular’ than Welles’s, he is ‘no less determined to do away with montage and to transfer to the screen the *continuum* of reality’ (Bazin 1967: 37). The depth and duration of the shots in films such as *Paisà* (1946) are modest compared with Welles’s films, but Rossellini still places a great emphasis on the shot’s ability to capture the action in its entirety, rather than analysing it. Bazin elaborates on this idea in ‘An Aesthetic of Reality’, comparing Rossellini’s approach in *Paisà* to his example of the classically edited sequence depicting a prisoner in his cell. He notes that, in the neorealist film, the close-up of the door knob would be substituted with a shot of the entire door, ‘whose

concrete characteristics would be equally visible', and, by extension, the actors' performances would not be 'dissociate[d] ... from the decor or from the performance of their fellow actors. Man himself is just one fact among others, to whom no pride of place should be given *a priori*' (Bazin 1971: 38). In a later article, defending Rossellini's films of the early 1950s from critical attacks in Italy, he sought to establish a definition of neorealism.²⁰ Here, Bazin observes that neorealist filmmakers recognise that 'there is a certain "wholeness" to reality', and he concludes that 'neorealism by definition rejects analysis, whether political, moral, psychological, logical, or social, of the characters and their actions. It looks on reality as a whole, not incomprehensible, certainly, but inseparably one' (Bazin 1971: 97). Using the long take, Rossellini is able to maintain the concrete relations between things, to preserve the wholeness of the action and its 'existential density'. Furthermore, unlike Welles, Rossellini's film does not employ superimposition or other technical tricks in the composition of the shot, and so the impression of spatial wholeness provided by the long take follows more directly from its photographic ontology. In other words, there is a much closer relationship between the direct realism of the long take and its perceptual realism.²¹

The neorealists' emphasis on the wholeness of the action also encourages a profound quality of ambiguity, which follows from the perceptual freedom offered by the shots. Bazin notes that, as in Welles's films, 'neorealism tends to give back to the cinema a sense of the ambiguity of reality ... Rossellini is concerned to preserve its mystery' (Bazin 1967: 37). Where the shot in the classical sequence provides 'an

²⁰ The letter, entitled 'In Defense of Rossellini' was addressed to the prominent Italian left-wing critic and editor of *Cinema Nuovo*, Guido Aristarco, and it was first published in that journal in 1955. It is cited here from the English reprint in *What is Cinema? Vol. 2* (1971).

²¹ This effect is also achieved throughout the film by the undifferentiated use of documentary footage together with Rossellini's own material, and the extensive location shooting, which blur the boundaries between the direct photographic record of historical reality, captured by the camera, and the fictional world depicted in the shot.

abstract view of a reality which is being analyzed', in *Paisà*, Bazin suggests, we are instead presented with the 'fact': 'a fragment of concrete reality in itself multiple and full of ambiguity, whose meaning emerges only after the fact' (Bazin 1971: 37). The meaning of the action arises, subsequently, through our own observations and interpretation of the details presented. But the film itself offers no guide through the editing; the shot presents the action as a whole and we must discern its significance. The experience offered by the film is therefore similar to that offered by Welles's films. By preserving the wholeness of the action in the long take, both filmmakers allow a greater degree of perceptual freedom and encourage an ambiguous quality in the depiction of events, which compels the spectator to more actively examine the scene, as they would do in the world.

But we can see that Rossellini also goes further in this respect than his American predecessor because his film does not utilise the compositional guides within the long take that are notable in Welles's films. In *Paisà*, the compositions tend to be much rougher and are generally more casual than the meticulously arranged framings of *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons*. One factor influencing this compositional roughness is the limitations imposed by filming largely on location, where the scenery cannot be adjusted for the benefit of the camera. Welles's films, on the other hand, utilise all the mechanics of the studio to compose the scene entirely for the camera. Furthermore, the lighting in the neorealist film is largely flat and inexpressive, more closely resembling the natural light of the particular locations, and the details within the shot appear equally prominent in terms of their exposure. The sound in *Paisà* is also much more chaotic and does not draw attention so forcefully to certain areas of the shot as it does in Welles's films. Thus, the absence of these stylistic guides within the space of the shot creates a more genuinely open depiction

of the events in which the spectator's perceptual freedom becomes further pronounced.

Rossellini further develops this ambiguous realist aesthetic by employing the long take in the service of a more elliptical approach to the events in general. As Bazin writes: 'the technique of Rossellini undoubtedly maintains an intelligible succession of events, but these do not mesh like a chain with the sprockets of a wheel. The mind has to leap from one event to the other' (Bazin 1971: 35). Not only does Rossellini maintain ambiguity in the film by preserving the integrity of the action, forcing the spectator to actively locate significant details and then interpret the meaning of the scene; as Bazin points out, he deals with events that are in themselves indeterminate, seemingly inconsequential and tenuously connected. Tom Paulus points out in an essay on Bazin and the evolution of the deep-focus style that: 'what he was responding to in Rossellini was the *combination* of the long-take/depth-staging schema and a modernist conception of storytelling characterized by unresolved endings, elliptical story structure and attention for "micro-actions", occurrences that do nothing to advance the plot' (Paulus 2007: 72). In Welles's films, the long take works in relation to events that are, by comparison, dramatically and narratively well defined, even if the responsibility is placed on the spectator to identify the significant details from the scene's totality. Bazin's hypothetical breakdown of his two example scenes, using analytical editing, shows that the action has a dramatic unity despite the sense of ambiguity introduced by the composition in depth. In *Paisà*, however, the nature of the events is fundamentally more uncertain, which marks a greater fulfilment of the realist aesthetic that Bazin associates with long-take filmmaking.

The highly ambiguous aesthetic that neorealist filmmakers such as Rossellini were able to promote through their use of the long take can also be seen to emerge as

a response to their particular socio-historical context. Aside from the notable influence of the existentialist and phenomenological thinking that Bazin indicates in his writing, there were also significant political undercurrents shaping the use of the long take. The openness, plurality and greater perceptual freedom offered by the technique marked a fundamental rejection of the way that editing could impose a particular interpretation on events, influencing or even manipulating the spectator, particularly for ideological purposes. Following the experience of fascism and the way that cinema had been used as a tool of political propaganda, the neorealists demonstrated a mistrust of any such control over the spectator. They sought, instead, a more democratic film style as a means to represent a new society after twenty years of Mussolini's dictatorship, encouraging the spectator to take responsibility for understanding the meaning of events.²² Neorealist filmmakers therefore aimed to take an objective approach towards reality by maintaining the physical continuity of space and action through the long take, rather than shaping its cinematic presentation according to predetermined (especially ideological) interpretations through analytical editing. As such, ambiguity became a particularly desired quality in their films.

The developments brought about by neorealism in the post-war years can be examined in greater detail by looking more closely at an example from *Paisà*. In his discussion of the film, Bazin mentions in particular the film's fourth episode, which is set in Florence, though he does not discuss this example in great detail. Therefore, the following passages will elaborate more thoroughly on some of his observations. The episode follows an American nurse, Harriet (Harriet Medin), as she tries to get into the Nazi-occupied city centre from her military base on the outskirts, so that she can

²² Neorealism's ambiguous long-take style would also form a model for other filmmakers to eschew propagandist manipulation in highly politicised film cultures during later decades, for example, in socialist Eastern Europe.

meet a partisan leader named Guido. On route, she meets a friend, Massimo (Renzo Avanzo), who is also trying to get into the city to find his wife and child. Together they take the dangerous journey through the city's streets and derelict buildings to meet a group of partisans fighting the fascists in a street battle. Massimo makes a dash across the street towards his home on the other side, which provokes an outburst of gunfire and a partisan is fatally wounded. Harriet helps him to safety, sheltering in a doorway and, in his dying words, he then reveals that the man she is looking for is dead.

Bazin observes that, while the film follows Harriet's journey step by step, depicting all the encounters that she faces along the way, Rossellini remains notably objective in his depiction of the events: 'attention is never artificially focused on the heroine. The camera makes no pretence at being psychologically subjective' (Bazin 1971: 36). He points out that, throughout the episode, the film's attention is divided between the adventure of the two main characters and the general conditions of the environment in which the story takes place. Rossellini refuses to employ analytical editing and strict causal connections between events to focus exclusively on dramatically significant action, making the environment a mere background to this action. Instead, the camera takes in the wider surroundings of the city and makes them equally present in the film. Bazin writes: 'everything that is happening in a Florence in the throes of the Liberation is of a like importance. The personal adventures of the two individuals blend into the mass of other adventures' (Bazin 1971: 36). Rather than presenting a distinct dramatic scenario in this episode, Bazin emphasises that Rossellini captures a wider reality, in which the journey of the two characters is only one part of the whole.

Bazin's observations on the integral realism of the Florence episode can be seen in the numerous long takes that Rossellini employs to depict the action. At the beginning of the episode, Rossellini does not focus immediately on Harriet to establish her position as the main protagonist. The scene opens with a number of lengthy, documentary-like shots that observe the various actions taking place outside the hospital: ambulances arriving, wounded soldiers walking in and military jeeps driving down the road. These shots allow us to take in the various details of the space without focusing on any particular actions that move the plot forward. In a way, the shots act to establish the environment, but their lengths exceed the ordinary requirements of establishing shots. As a result, the various details become more prominent than a mere background to the main action that is about to start. Rossellini affords the general environment a greater presence in the shots right from the start. The film then dissolves into the hospital as a group of wounded partisans arrive. They are greeted by the medical staff and directed to the nurses for treatment. In a deep-focus long take, the camera shows some of the soldiers walking across the room and a nurse enters the shot to assist one of the injured men. The nurse is Harriet, but Rossellini does not give her entrance any prominence. The wide framing of the camera and the abundance of various actions in the frame diminish her status; she is initially presented to us in the same casual manner as the other minor characters in the scene. Our attention is not directed specifically towards Harriet through editing or stylistic guides within the shot and we are as free to focus on the other details in the scene as we are to observe her. Only subsequently do we come to understand her significance, when Rossellini establishes her centrality in a shot/reverse-shot conversation sequence that reveals her desire to reach Guido in the centre of the city. Furthermore, after this important narrative development, Rossellini then turns his

attention away from Harriet once again to show another group of partisans that enter the hospital to be treated. Thus, in this first scene, Rossellini does not focus exclusively on the protagonist. Her actions become one part (though certainly an important one) of the wider environment and the various other activities depicted in the shots.



Fig 1.3 *Paisà* (1946)

Following this scene, on her journey into the city with Massimo, Harriet also encounters a number of incidents that are not directly related to the dramatic focus of the plot. For example, they meet two British soldiers sitting on a hill, discussing the city's architecture. The characters exchange a few words about the advancing British forces, but no significant information is revealed. They are as uncertain about the developing events as the protagonists. The incident becomes a momentary pause or distraction. It is something that the characters happen to encounter on the course of their travels, yet Rossellini does not exclude the event because it seems irrelevant.

Instead, he includes it and maintains the event in its entirety, mostly in a single shot. Another notable example, later in the episode, is demonstrated when Harriet and Massimo come across an old man watching the fighting from his roof terrace. The incident is filmed in a single long take and is the longest shot in the episode. The characters ask the man for directions and information about the patrolling German soldiers before they continue on their way. However, before they move on, Rossellini includes the old man's slightly rambling discussions, when he points out the various weapons being fired and tells the characters that he can dodge the bullets, having fought in the 'real' war in 1918. These moments of the scene are not cut out in order to focus solely on the story of the two main characters. Furthermore, using the long take and deep focus, Rossellini does not focus our attention specifically on the protagonists, but makes them only part of the wider environment and action depicted in the shot. We are free to observe the various details that are present in the shot, but which have no direct relevance to the narrative, such as the young boy who stands silently behind the old man, with a bird sitting on his shoulder.

The revelation of Guido's death at the end of the episode is also handled in such a way that Rossellini does not allow Harriet's personal drama to overwhelm the wider situation. When the partisan is shot and Harriet takes him to shelter, Rossellini turns his camera away from her to follow the upheaval caused when the partisans capture two fascist fighters, drag them along the street and execute them with machineguns. The film presents this incident in its entirety before returning to Harriet, where the dying man casually mentions Guido's death amongst his semi-conscious ramblings. This fundamental revelation appears rather abrupt and understated, especially following the previous events of the execution. Rossellini does not give any particular weight to the disclosure of Guido's death. The moment is shown in a single

shot that frames both characters and, although the camera is placed close to Harriet, showing her distress, Rossellini does not use cutting at this point for dramatic emphasis. Bazin points out that the information is revealed ‘by chance’: ‘the statement from which she learned the news was not aimed straight at her – but hit her like a stray bullet’ (Bazin 1971: 36). Thus, even at this climactic moment, Rossellini still places the drama within the wider environment and refuses to isolate or emphasise it in any way that would set its significance apart from the other events depicted in the episode.

Long-Take Style and the Neorealist Influence: *Breathless*

The influence of neorealism and, in particular, the aesthetic qualities that Bazin discovered in the work of filmmakers like Rossellini, were strongly felt by many filmmakers working in the following decades. Though Bazin did not live to see the expansion of long-take filmmaking during the 1960s and 1970s, his theories certainly look forward to these subsequent developments, and they provide a significant conceptualisation of this stylistic tradition within modern European cinema. One such film that evidences the continuation of the realist long-take aesthetic is Jean-Luc Godard’s seminal debut feature *Breathless* (*À bout de souffle*, 1960), a landmark of the French New Wave and a highly significant work in modern European cinema more widely.²³ Godard was, like his fellow New Wave filmmakers working in the early 1960s, influenced by the neorealist films of Rossellini, which he and others championed as critics at *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Godard and his colleagues were also influenced directly by the realist theories of Bazin, who was editor of the journal at

²³ For Kovács, Godard is one of four key filmmakers in modern European cinema, whose work has been most influential on its overall stylistic development. The other filmmakers he cites are Robert Bresson, Michelangelo Antonioni and Alain Resnais. See *Screening Modernism* (Kovács 2007: 127-128).

the time. Naomi Greene notes that, ‘once they began making films it became clear how much they owed to what might be seen as the neo-realist aesthetic’, and she points out that ‘like their mentor, they too believed – as Bazin argues so powerfully throughout his essays on neo-realism – that aesthetic choices imply a given relationship with reality, a particular way of perceiving, and representing, the world’ (Greene 2007: 22-23). In his biography of Godard, Colin MacCabe also writes that the filmmaker is ‘unthinkable without the philosophical and critical thinking of André Bazin’ (MacCabe 2003: 58). There are undeniable differences between *Breathless* and *Paisà*; Godard cannot be said to directly replicate Rossellini. His film more generally exemplifies the clear distinctions between neorealism and the New Wave, despite their lineage. As Greene notes, Godard and his New Wave colleagues ‘sought to capture “reality” in ways quite different from those exemplified in neo-realist films and/or espoused by Bazin’ (Greene 2007: 22). Where Rossellini’s starting point is actuality, refusing fantastical plots to restage the contemporary events of the war, events whose marks remain present on the film’s landscape, Godard begins with a conventional Hollywood genre: the gangster film. Nonetheless, there remains an important connection between the two filmmakers in the way that they approach the events depicted in their films. Godard, like Rossellini, firmly places the story within actuality, and he is also as concerned with the density of the world surrounding the characters.

Much of the critical writing on Godard’s early films draws attention to his innovation of the jump cut and, more generally, his discontinuous or fragmented editing practices, which disrupt the rules of classical continuity upheld by analytical editing. For example, Richard Neupert argues that ‘the overall visual style in *Breathless*’ is characterised by ‘the use of temporal and spatial ellipses’, and he notes

that ‘discontinuity editing tactics abound throughout’, especially through Godard’s use of the jump cut (Neupert 2007: 216).²⁴ For Kovács, Godard epitomises the practice of ‘radical discontinuity’ in modern cinema through his ‘self-conscious use of jump cuts’ and his ‘collage technique’ (Kovács 2007: 131-135). While I accept that these editing practices form a particularly salient feature of Godard’s filmmaking, it is important to point out that, throughout the 1960s, Godard also remained an extensive practitioner of the long take. His use of the long take has received much less critical attention than his use of editing, but, as Valerie Orpen points out, ‘the long take bears Godard’s signature just as much as the jump cuts’ (Orpen 2003: 84). In fact, his films most often display a dialectical formal approach, with some scenes fragmented through jump cuts and discontinuous editing while others are handled in a single, extended long take, a pattern that is evident in *Breathless*. Here, I shall restrict my discussion exclusively to the latter stylistic tendency of the film.

Godard’s use of the long take in *Breathless* is exemplified in two scenes early in the film. The first of these is the famous meeting between the two protagonists, Michel (Jean-Paul Belmondo) and Patricia (Jean Seburg) on the Champs-Élysées. Having murdered a police officer on route to Paris, Michel finds Patricia selling newspapers and asks her to go with him to Rome. The camera frames the characters in a long shot walking along the street, amongst the vehicles and pedestrians that surround them. We track behind the characters as they walk up the road, discussing Michel’s trip to Marseilles and he then asks her to go to Rome. When they reach a junction, Michel asks her to walk back with him the other way and they turn towards the camera, moving back down the street as the camera tracks in reverse, framing

²⁴ For further critical accounts emphasising Godard’s fragmentary editing practices in *Breathless* see, for example: David Sterritt’s *The Films of Jean-Luc Godard: Seeing the Invisible* (Sterritt 1999: 47), MacCabe’s *Godard* (MacCabe 2003: 121-122) and Douglas Morrey’s *Jean-Luc Godard* (Morrey 2005: 9).

them from the front. Michel attempts to romance Patricia and encourage her to leave with him, though she is unconvinced. Finally they agree to meet later that evening and Michel exits the shot. Patricia then looks off-screen and chases after him to say goodbye, at which point Godard cuts to another shot showing them part and the scene ends.



Fig. 1.4 *Breathless* (1960)

A few moments later in the film, there is another significant long-take sequence, when Michel visits his friend and ex-convict Tolmachoff (Richard Balducci) at a travel agency to collect a cheque. Throughout the sequence, the camera tracks along with Michel as he moves through the building. It follows him to a desk where he asks for Tolmachoff, then circles around Michel and follows him to another desk where he meets the man. Here the camera circles around Michel in the opposite direction and then follows him and Tolmachoff as they walk down a corridor to

another desk at the rear of the building. They collect the envelope and then return to the front desk, with the camera tracking in reverse to follow them. At the desk, the camera circles around Michel as it did earlier in the scene, while he makes a call to another associate. He is unable to contact the man, then says goodbye to Tolmachoff and leaves for the exit. The camera follows Michel to the exit as two police officers enter the travel agency looking for him. The shot then cuts to the officers at the desk asking for Tolmachoff, and the rest of the scene is handled in another long tracking shot where the camera follows the characters as it did with Michel.

In these long takes, Godard is, firstly, concerned as much as Welles to preserve the totality of the actors' performances and their interactions with each other in a single space. For example, in the street scene, the camera follows Michel and Patricia without breaking into close-ups as they speak. Godard captures their full figures, observing the manner in which each character walks and their various physical interactions, rather than focusing on their facial reactions and cutting between them to follow the dialogue. Instead, their relationship is conveyed through the minor details of the performances, for instance when Michel strokes Patricia's head as he approaches her and when he stares at her as they walk back down the street in silence, or when he puts his arm around her and she shrugs him off, pulling an exaggerated facial expression. Michel's attempts to seduce Patricia are reflected in these various details of his performance, and her attempts to refuse his advances are similarly depicted largely through her physical movements rather than directly in the dialogue; she avoids eye contact with him and moves away slightly as he gets closer to her. In the scene at the travel agency, Godard is again concerned to preserve the totality of the performance, with his camera following Michel's movements through the space. Much of the scene involves little dialogue and the simple action of walking

from one desk to another. However, Godard is interested in observing the manner of Michel's gait, as he swaggers coolly through the space. These details of his performance again reveal qualities of his character, his gangster-like persona. Using the long take in these two scenes, Godard is therefore able to present the characters in a way that reveals key features of their behaviour while still respecting the reality of the performances.

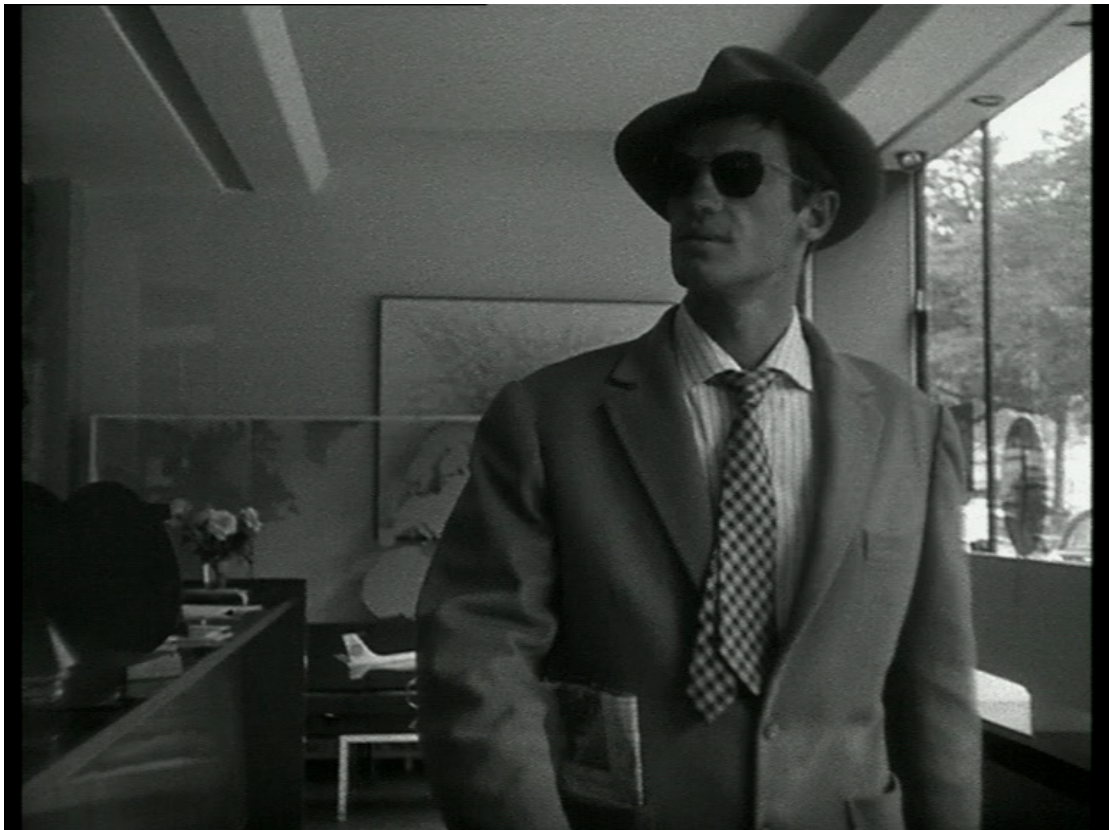


Fig. 1.5 *Breathless* (1960)

Although Godard is concerned with the performance of his characters in the long take, he is also concerned to place them within their surroundings. In these two scenes, Godard also uses the long take to preserve the relationship between the characters and their environment, rather than focusing on particular behavioural details to the exclusion of the wider location. Godard follows Rossellini's method in *Paisà* by refusing to isolate the characters from the physical reality they inhabit, showing both in a single space. As David Sterritt writes, Godard found in Rossellini's

approach ‘a model for his own conviction that the relationship between character and environment is as imposing as any subject a filmmaker could hope to tackle’, and he argues that Godard shares Rossellini’s concern to show ‘the way people relate to the places they are in, and conversely, the roles environment plays in determining how people move, how they present themselves to one another, how they interact with the physical world as a whole’ (Sterritt 1999: 54). Sterritt does not indicate the way that these concerns are addressed stylistically in the film, but it is apparent that Godard’s use of the long take is central to preserving the physical environment that surrounds the characters.

During the street scene, the camera frames Michel and Patricia in a long shot that also incorporates the surrounding architecture of the Champs-Élysées, in addition to the numerous vehicles that are parked or moving and the pedestrians around them. Godard does not cut-in to closer shots to focus exclusively on the characters, but places them within the wider environment of daily Parisian life. In the later scene at the travel agency the environment again has a significant presence in the shot. Although the camera follows Michel more closely than in the previous scene, the general activities taking place in the building are still captured in the background. For instance, as Michel moves through the space he passes attendants working at the various desks and other customers being served. By presenting the scene in a single long take, Godard also establishes the physical geography of the space and allows the spectator to directly experience its spatial integrity through the mobile camera. This becomes particularly notable when the camera insists on following Michel and Tolmachoff all the way down the long hallway to the desks at the rear of the building and then back to the front desk again. Godard thus renders the wholeness of the space

in which the action takes place and allows the fictional world to assume a much greater density than in the classically edited sequence.

Although Godard's long takes are not ambiguous to the extent that Bazin identifies in Rossellini's film, he still places emphasis on perceptual freedom in the scenes, and encourages the spectator to actively seek out the significant details of the scene from the whole. The perceptual openness of the long take is most apparent in the Champs-Élysées example, where the camera presents the two characters from some distance for the majority of the action. Godard does not cut between significant details to guide our attention and understanding of the characters' interactions, to underscore Michel's attempt to seduce Patricia and her rejection of his advances. Instead, we are forced to deduce these developments by identifying certain details of their behaviour from the totality of the action. The responsibility is placed on the spectator to locate and interpret these details from all the other elements of the *mise en scène* that remain present in the long take. Furthermore, like Rossellini, Godard does not employ compositional guides to encourage our attention towards particular details in the shot. The framings have a casual roughness that results from the restrictions of location shooting and the mobility of the camera as it follows the action. The lighting is also entirely natural, deriving from the sources present at the location, which creates a general flatness in the street scene and a tendency towards underexposure in the travel agency. In both cases, the lighting frustrates any sense of guidance to salient details in the frame.²⁵ But the shot also offers the perceptual freedom to focus on other elements of the scene that are unrelated to the characters

²⁵ These qualities also establish the documentary, newsreel-like aesthetic that many of Godard's commentators have noted in the film. For example, see Gilberto Perez's *The Material Ghost: Films and their Medium* (Perez 1998: 337, 343), Michel Marie's *The French New Wave: An Artistic School* (Marie 2003: 89) and Kovács's *Screening Modernism* (Kovács 2007: 172-173).

and their actions, such as the architectural details of the buildings, the cars that line the street, or the reactions of several passers-by as they stare towards the main characters (and the camera). We may choose to focus on the protagonists and their story, but we also have the ability to watch the daily life that is taking place around them.

These observations on the long take in Godard's *Breathless* show that the realist aesthetic Bazin associates with the technique in relation to Welles and Rossellini extends beyond these filmmakers. Realism becomes a pervasive feature of the long take as it is adopted and extended in the subsequent decades by directors such as Godard. The qualities of wholeness and continuity in the presentation of events, and the subsequent ambiguities and uncertainties surrounding their meanings, are taken further as the long take is utilised more extensively than before. At the same time, however, filmmakers begin to move away from, or rather, to complicate neorealist aesthetics by introducing other formal concerns into the long take. This is already suggested to some extent in the previous discussion of Godard and the French New Wave. The emphasis on genre iconography and, more importantly, the use of radical editing forms such as the jump cut, which are deployed side-by-side with the long take, reflect a stylistic interest that moves beyond the total commitment to realist authenticity. There is also a concern to stress some of the more abstract formal qualities of the film image, and this is done not only through countering editing techniques in the film but also within the long take itself. Therefore, while Bazin's initial insights provide an important theoretical base for the long take in modern European cinema, they are limited to an extent by focusing on one particular dimension. It will therefore be important to consider how the long-take filmmakers following neorealism develop their work beyond Bazin's reflections on the earlier

movement. Nonetheless, this does not mark an outright rejection of the realist aesthetics he championed in the long take, and the qualities of wholeness and ambiguity remain prominent throughout the period. This issue will be elaborated over the course of the following chapters in this thesis. Another issue that has yet to be examined in detail is how individual filmmakers utilise the realist aesthetics of the long take (as well as some of its abstracting qualities) towards particular artistic ends. It is this question that the thesis shall now turn to by looking in chapter two at a long-take film in close detail.

CHAPTER TWO:

REALISM, PSYCHOLOGY AND FORM IN *CRONACA DI UN AMORE*

‘For a director the problem is to catch a reality which is never static’
(Michelangelo Antonioni 1964: 14)

This chapter will examine Michelangelo Antonioni’s first feature, *Cronaca di un amore* (*Story of a Love Affair*, 1950), considering, especially, how the long take promotes realism in the film. Taking its lead from the previous chapter, my analysis will therefore seek to further investigate the ideas put forward by Bazin through the close examination of long takes in this film. The analysis will also seek to understand how Antonioni utilises these broadly defined realist features of the long take in distinctive ways and for particular purposes. It shall question, in particular, how Antonioni employs the neorealist aesthetics of the long take in relation to certain thematic concerns in the film, notably, the film’s interest in the relationship between the external world and the psychological state of the characters. But rather than an unproblematic demonstration of the long take’s realist properties, according to Bazin, *Cronaca di un amore* complicates these ideas by simultaneously emphasising a heightened stylistic organisation of its images. This chapter will therefore also attempt to account for the tensions in the film between realism and formalism in the long take, and indicate the significance of this dialectic both in Antonioni’s film and in modern European cinema more widely in the period following the initial experiments of neorealist filmmakers such as Rossellini.

Cronaca di un amore, like Antonioni’s other films of the 1950s, has received significantly less attention than the films he made with Monica Vitti in the early

1960s, beginning with *L'avventura* in 1960.¹ By focusing on *Cronaca di un amore*, this chapter aims to illuminate an area of Antonioni's filmmaking that is less familiar, and to relate this film more prominently with the ideas and concepts that have been developed around the later films. It intends to show that several of the achievements accredited to Antonioni in his 1960s films can, in fact, be found already in *Cronaca di un amore*, even if in a somewhat more embryonic form. Furthermore, by taking Antonioni's debut film as its subject, the chapter shall consider the immediate developments of a filmmaker following the first wave of neorealism.

The second reason for my focus on this film is specific to the concerns of this thesis. Kovács notes that 'it is often taken for granted that Antonioni's style involves extreme long takes and also long camera movements ... [but] excessive long takes and long camera movement style characterize Antonioni only at the beginning of his career' (Kovács 2007: 153-154). In *Cronaca di un amore*, Antonioni's use of the long take is extensive, with the sequence shot becoming his primary method of presentation. In *L'avventura* and the films that follow, however, his use of the long take is less extensive. Although Antonioni remains a notable practitioner of the long take during this period, this is balanced against an increased use of editing within the scene, and the sequence shot is no longer his most prominent stylistic feature. As Chatman notes, 'there are many takes in *L'avventura* that last as long as those characteristic of *Cronaca di un amore* ... [but] the long takes are mixed with many short takes' (Chatman 1985: 15). And Gilberto Perez similarly points out that 'from *L'Avventura* onward, his films combine the searching move with the terse cut, the

¹ Of the major studies on Antonioni's work in English, few discuss *Cronaca di un amore* in detail, or at all. For example, the film is absent from William Arrowsmith's *Antonioni: The Poet of Images* (1995) and also from Peter Brunette's *The Films of Michelangelo Antonioni* (1998). In *Antonioni; or, the Surface of the World* (1985) Seymour Chatman does discuss the film, but this is limited to a short section of his first chapter. The main exception to this trend is Sam Rohdie's book, *Antonioni* (1990), which dedicates a more lengthy discussion to the film's critical reception around the time of its release.

fluid with the abrupt perceptual shift, the reflective pause that makes us look again with the interruptive concatenation of sharply different aspects' (Perez 1998: 375). Therefore, given the focus of this thesis, it seems appropriate to examine a film in which Antonioni's practice of the long take is most pronounced.

Neorealism and Psychological Investigation

In *Cronaca di un amore*, Antonioni builds on the aesthetic developments introduced by neorealism and, in particular, its emphasis on spatial wholeness and the physical presence of the environment, achieved primarily through the long take. But Antonioni also takes his work in a new direction by examining the relationship between the external world inhabited by the characters and their inner, psychological states. The neorealist cinema of the immediate post-war years utilised the long take to depict the characters firmly from the outside, showing their relation to the material and social environment. In *Paisà*, Rossellini is concerned with the turbulent climate of the Italian liberation near the end of the war; it is the conditions of the war-torn environment that defines the existence of characters in the film. In the Florence episode that was discussed in the previous chapter, for instance, Rossellini follows Harriet's disorderly journey through the warzone of the city to reach Guido. On route she encounters several incidents that distract from her personal mission, where she confronts her surrounding environment and the general crisis faced by many others who are also living through the experience of war.

In another landmark neorealist film of the 1940s, Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (*Ladri di biciclette*, 1948), the crisis of post-war economic collapse becomes the central concern. The film follows the meandering search of Antonio (Lamberto Maggiorani) and his son Bruno (Enzo Staiola) through the streets of Rome to find

their stolen bicycle, which Antonio desperately needs to keep his job. On their journey through the city, Antonio and Bruno encounter various events that halt the forward drive of their search for the bicycle, bringing to light the wider social and economic conditions faced by many others, most notably the suspected thief himself. In these films, the emphasis on long takes weakens the causal development of the plot, allowing minor events and distractions to become central and placing the characters firmly within their surrounding environment, an environment defined by social and economic conditions.

Antonioni builds on this long-take aesthetic that relates character to environment, but he does so as a means to explore the interior psychology of his protagonists. In a 1958 interview, reprinted in his collected writings and interviews, *The Architecture of Vision* (1996), Antonioni considers his evolution from the strictly social concerns of neorealism to a more psychological focus. Taking *Bicycle Thieves* as his main point of reference, Antonioni states that ‘today, once the problem of the bicycle has been eliminated’ – that is, after economic and social stability has been restored – ‘it is important to see what is inside this man whose bicycle was stolen, what are his thoughts, what are his feelings, how much is left inside of him of his past experiences’ (Antonioni 1996: 8). In the earlier neorealist films, character is defined exclusively by the external crisis: Antonio’s need to find the bicycle in order to keep his job, or Harriet’s determination to meet with Guido in *Paisà*. Antonioni, instead, turns to the inner crisis faced by his characters. As James Williams writes: ‘by the time Antonioni made *Story of a Love Affair* he had effectively arrived at a second stage of neo-realism, focusing on the mysteries of individual psychology rather than the characters’ physical plights’ (Williams 2008: 50). Williams points out that Antonioni ‘would take to an extreme a central feature of neo-realism: the detachment

of space from its locking into narrative intrigue and desire', but not to focus on 'social and political struggle', but instead to explore 'the aesthetic effects of landscape on the psychological state of the protagonists' (Williams 2008: 50). In *Cronaca di un amore*, the starting point for Antonioni's psychological investigation is the narrative structure of a film noir.

The film starts with an investigation, arranged by a wealthy Milanese industrialist Enrico Fontana (Ferdinando Sarmi), into his mysterious young wife Paola (Lucia Bosé), after he finds photographs of her with another man. Carloni (Gino Rossi), the private detective employed by Enrico, then discovers an incident in Paola's past: years before, her friend Giovanna died after falling down a lift shaft when she was with her fiancé Guido (Massimo Girotti) and Paola. News of the investigation reaches Guido and he goes to meet Paola again for the first time since the incident. Both characters fear that the detective will discover their secret love affair at the time of Giovanna's death, and their failure to warn her of the broken lift that allowed her to fall to her death. Their reunion leads to a rekindling of their love affair, which is once again prevented by a third individual, this time Paola's husband. The lovers plan to murder Enrico, allowing them to be together, along with his fortune. However, Guido is unable to commit the murder because Enrico dies in an automobile accident after learning of the love affair. The lovers' desire is thus realised by chance, but the sense of guilt about both deaths remains and Guido leaves Paola once more.

As this brief synopsis demonstrates, *Cronaca di un amore* portrays a story of illicit passion and death.² But Antonioni's treatment of the events contrasts starkly

² The film is loosely based on the James M. Cain novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934) and displays some strong affinities with Luchino Visconti's earlier adaptation of the novel, *Ossessione* (*Obsession*, 1943), often considered to be the first neorealist film. Both

with classical dramaturgy and its depiction of psychological melodrama. Instead, he expands on the neorealist long-take aesthetic, privileging the integral realism of space and action through the long take. In the same interview previously cited, Antonioni indicates the connection between his use of the long take and his concern with the psychological state of his characters, noting that his use of the technique ‘seems to me very closely related to the interest I have in following the characters until their innermost thoughts are revealed’, and he goes on to suggest that ‘it is important to establish, to capture the moments in the life of a character that appear to be less important’ (Antonioni 1996: 8). Antonioni’s approach to the interior dimension of the characters is thus marked by a notable distance and externality, an attention to the surface of events, which he achieves through the long take.³ He does not edit the action to construct space exclusively according to the psychological drama. This respect for the physical relations between things thus espouses a concern to capture objective reality that connects Antonioni firmly with the aesthetic that Bazin first uncovered in neorealism.

Wholeness and Landscape

Throughout the film, Antonioni’s long takes maintain the density and presence of the environment surrounding the characters, so that it exceeds its function as a mere backdrop to the main action. Antonioni expands on his neorealist predecessors’ developments by utilising the long take to a much greater extent, thus further emphasising the integrity of space and action in the shot. Antonioni’s use of the long

films also star Massimo Girotti in the male lead role. For a further account of these connections see Peter Bondanella’s *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present*, 3rd Edition (Bondanella 2001: 109-111).

³ Chatman’s phrase ‘the surface of the world’ in the title of his book on Antonioni most aptly encapsulates the nature of his filmmaking.

take in *Cronaca di un amore* provides a heightened degree of deep-focus, which allows us to take in the wider space of the locations depicted. The film does not employ analytical editing to focus solely around the central characters; they are presented as part of the wider environment and we are able, and encouraged, to shift our attention between them and the other details within their surroundings. This prominence of landscape within the frame is a feature of Antonioni's filmmaking that has been noted repeatedly in relation to his films of the 1960s. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, for example, writes of one scene in *L'avventura* that: 'the location is not just somewhere for the event to take place, but synonymous with the event itself (equally the event is the location and not just something that happens there)' (Nowell-Smith 1964: 16). Similarly, Robert Phillip Kolker notes, more generally, that 'the characters inhabit a place, which is as important, perhaps more so, than the characters alone' (Kolker 1983: 138). Also, in his more extensive study of Antonioni's cinema, Chatman dedicates an entire chapter to the issue of settings and environments in the 'great tetralogy' of the early-1960s, and he argues that 'if one had to select Antonioni's leading contribution to the art of cinema, it would have to be his way of relating character to environment' (Chatman 1985: 90). Looking at *Cronaca di un amore*, it is clear, however, that Antonioni's concern with the relationship between character and surrounding landscape, which defines his more famous films, is already present. This is achieved in the film primarily through the deep-focus composition of the long take.

Antonioni's use of deep focus becomes prominent in practically all of the film's long takes, but it is especially striking in exterior scenes, where Antonioni is able to place the characters within vast open spaces in and around the city. This is demonstrated, for example, when Guido waits beside a sports field for Paola,

preceding their first rendezvous where he reveals a letter from an old friend warning them about the detective. The first image we see is a long shot of the sports field, with a team of boys playing rugby in the background. The camera pans left, following the coach as he walks to the side of the field where Guido stands watching. The camera frames the protagonist on the left edge of the frame and the coach on the opposite side, with the players framed in the middle of the shot and in the far background. The two men discuss the match and Guido reveals that he used to be a rugby player himself. During this conversation, Antonioni maintains the wide framing of the long take, rather than cutting into a shot/reverse-shot sequence between the two men. Then, the sound of a vehicle approaching from off-screen becomes audible, Guido turns around to notice Paola's car approaching and he walks up to the road on the edge of the field. The camera follows him, panning round to frame Guido once more in a long shot, now framed on the right edge of the frame. In the background is a concrete wall, running along the other side of the road, behind which is a long row of trees towering over the wall, running in a similar pattern along the street. Paola's car pulls up in the middle of the frame and she gets out. Guido remains standing, observing the woman hesitantly, before approaching to greet her. At this point, Antonioni does not emphasise Paola's arrival by cutting to a closer shot of her and nor does he break the scene into a shot/reverse-shot sequence when the characters start to converse. As Guido approaches, the film does cut to a reverse-angle shot (the second of the scene's two shots), framing the couple from the other side, with the field and the rugby players now clearly visible in the background. When they get in the car and drive away the camera then pans to frame the vehicle moving along the road into the distance, and it also reveals the wide, flat landscape surrounding the vehicle, with the row of trees leading off into the depth of the shot.



Fig. 2.1 *Cronaca di un amore* (1950)

In this scene it is clear that Antonioni refuses to sacrifice the integrity of the space to focus exclusively on his characters and their reactions. Utilising the deep-focus long take, he places Guido and Paola firmly within their surrounds, and allows the various environmental details, such as the players' movements in the background and the architectural features of the built space, to assume as much presence in the shot as the characters themselves. Another important feature of the long take in *Cronaca di un amore* that is geared towards this spatial realism, and which is demonstrated to a limited extent in this scene is camera movement. Throughout the film, Antonioni combines his emphasis on deep-focus composition with a fluidly mobile camera that explores the locations, preserving spatial continuity and placing us within the wider environment of the action. As Chatman observes: 'since the shots proceed by elaborate and sweeping tracks into and through the location, there is a

profound sense of depth, of mingling with the characters and the objects in their world' (Chatman 1985: 19-20). The movement of Antonioni's camera reveals a proliferation of details in the *mise en scène* that give the depicted environments a significant density and presence in the shot; location becomes more than a mere background to the main action, but an equally important feature of interest for the camera.

Antonioni's use of the mobile long take in *Cronaca di un amore* is exhibited explicitly when Paola awaits a call from Guido after he visits the friend that informed him about the detective. Unable to contact him, Paola returns to the main room of a high-class social club, where a number of her wealthy acquaintances are gathered. The camera then follows Paola as she moves around the room, moving restlessly from one area to another. First she asks a waiter for some cigarettes, before returning to a table with some friends to play cards. The camera observes Paola from a distance as she distractedly finishes the game and leaves the table. The camera then follows her across the room towards an ornate table and clock, below a large painting, where the waiter hands her a cigarette. She asks him for a Martini and he exits the frame. At the same time, another woman enters the shot carrying a fluffy white dog and greets Paola. The camera then refocuses on her as she speaks absurdly to the dog. In the background, a gentleman approaches Paola and they start to dance, moving off-screen. The woman then exits the frame as Paola and her dance partner move back into shot, while her conversation with her dog can still be heard in the background. Paola remains disengaged from her partner and looks at her watch pensively. The camera tracks with them across the room, until it settles beside a sofa turning its attention to a number of well-dressed ladies who are sitting and talking. As Paola and the man move out of shot, the film then cuts to a reverse angle for the scene's second

lengthy take, showing the women from the front as they discuss what to buy for a friend. Behind them, in the depth of the shot, can be seen the other wealthy socialites playing cards and the ornate decoration of the room, including a chandelier, paintings and long curtains. Paola and the man then move back into shot behind the sofa, continuing their dance. This is eventually interrupted when the telephone rings from off-screen and Paola leaves the shot to answer it. The camera does not follow her at this point, however; it remains in place as the gentleman who was dancing with Paola joins the ladies. Finally, Antonioni cuts to a less extensive long take that ends the scene, showing Paola saying goodbye to some of the other clients and leaving the club.

As Antonioni's camera moves, uninterrupted, through the space of the social club, it reveals a wealth of details that make the setting notably present to our attention. The camera does not fix on Paola to the exclusion of the many other actions or visual elements in the scene, and it frequently leaves her to explore these secondary features. Antonioni's method in this scene, as elsewhere in the film, contrasts starkly with the established practice of analytical editing and its arrangement of space dramatically centred on the main characters. Chatman notes of the film's mobile long takes that 'traditional categories like close-up and long shot lose their meaning in this kind of film, since the camera moves back and forth with unrestrained fluidity, approaching or distancing itself from the setup' (Chatman 1985: 20). Perez also points out that 'such an arrangement of shifting attention, of entrances and exits and paths variously crossing the camera's own path of gaze, will often make the dramatically central visually marginal and the dramatically marginal visually central' (Perez 1998: 375). The scene in the social club exemplifies this turn away from dramatic action in the way that the camera negotiates the various activities taking place around the room.

But the broader purpose of this approach is to comprehend the location as a whole, taking account of its various elements while also emphasising the physical relations between them, through the continuity of the long take.



Fig. 2.2 *Cronaca di un amore* (1950)

In *Cronaca di un amore*, the deep-focus compositions and camera movements within the long take therefore work to place the characters firmly within the surrounding environment and to preserve the wholeness of space and action in the scene, where the characters form one part of the *mise en scène*. Antonioni thus builds on the neorealist concern with cinema's ability to photographically capture the physical relations of surface reality, as Bazin suggests. But, for Antonioni, it is through this emphasis on surface reality in the long take that he also reveals the effect of the landscape on the psychological states of the characters. Discussing the relationship between landscape and character in Antonioni's 'great tetralogy' of the

1960s, Chatman writes: ‘refusing in these films to treat background as mere decor there solely to “establish” locale, he uses settings to represent characters’ states of mind ... restrict[ing] himself to the visual field, Antonioni relied on the technique of “landscape-as-state-of-soul”’ (Chatman 1985: 90). He argues that ‘the device suits an art that is at once intensely psychological and deeply committed to visual realism’ (Chatman 1985: 90). For Chatman, elements of the landscape work to convey the inner condition of the characters by metonymy. He stresses that Antonioni’s *mise en scène* is not metaphorical or symbolic but is, instead, metonymic because it conveys psychological meaning without losing its concrete physical presence as part of the reality inhabited by the characters; landscape becomes an ‘objective correlative’ of their psychological states.⁴ Chatman is right to emphasise the direct connection between the external, physical environment and the internal, psychological condition of the characters. This is not restricted, however, to the films that Chatman discusses and is something that already defines *Cronaca di un amore* as much as Antonioni’s later work. Chatman’s arguments about Antonioni’s avoidance of direct symbolism in the *mise en scène* are also sensitive to the realism of his cinema and, in particular, his extension of neorealist aesthetics. But it would be more accurate to say that, rather than representing or expressing mental states that already exist inside the characters, Antonioni shows that the landscape causes the psychological crises that afflict them. Following his neorealist predecessors, Antonioni approaches the characters firmly from the outside, showing their external condition, before then suggesting how this

⁴ See *Antonioni* (Chatman 1985: 68-70, 90-92). For a critique of Chatman’s distinction between metaphor and metonymy in Antonioni’s films see Perez’s *The Material Ghost: Films and their Medium* (Perez 1998: 406).

impacts on their inner psychology.⁵ Mark Shiel gives a more precise explanation of this issue than Chatman when he suggests that, in *Cronaca di un amore*, the long take ‘provides a visual means of emphasising the forms, surfaces and textures of the physical habitat and its effects upon the characters’ internal psychology’ (Shiel 2006: 101). He also points out, in particular, that these shots ‘emphasise the alienation of the human subject by his or her physical environment’ (Shiel 2006: 101). It is precisely this effect of psychological alienation that Guido and Paola experience in the film and that Antonioni is primarily concerned to explore.

The theme of alienation has been much discussed in critical responses to Antonioni’s cinema since the 1960s. Indeed, as Laura Rascaroli and John David Rhodes indicate in their introduction to the recent collection *Antonioni: Centenary Essays* (2011), ‘alienation is one of the most frequently encountered terms (and tropes) in critical writings on Antonioni’ (Rascaroli and Rhodes 2011: 7). For example, Nowell-Smith, though critical of the notion of alienation as an abstract concept, points out that Antonioni’s films ‘reflect a consistent view of the world and of the human situation from which alienation, or some related concept, could be isolated as a key factor’ (Nowell-Smith 1964: 18). Around the same time of Nowell-Smith’s article, the American critic Andrew Sarris also coined the term ‘Antonienness’ to describe this prevalent feature of his cinema.⁶ In his more extensive study, Chatman also identifies alienation as a central thematic of Antonioni’s films, especially from *L’avventura* onwards, stating that these films are about ‘the perilous state of our emotional life ... a life lacking in purpose, in passion, in zest, in a sense of

⁵ In a brief comment on the film, Bazin notes that it ‘can be described as neorealist ... because the director has not relied on an expressionism outside the characters; he builds his effects on their way of life’ (Bazin 1971: 66).

⁶ See ‘Interstitial, Pretentious, Alienated, Dead: Antonioni at 100’ (Rascaroli and Rhodes 2011: 7).

community, in ordinary human responsiveness, in the ability to communicate, in short, a life of spiritual vacuity' (Chatman 1985: 55). More recently, critics such as Peter Brunette have sought to move beyond this familiar and often repeated issue to examine Antonioni's cinema in different ways.⁷

While such broad notions about alienation in Antonioni's cinema have become well-recognised, more specific examination of the precise nature of characters' psychological alienation and the way in which this is induced by the surrounding landscape is less documented. Furthermore, the way this is emphasised stylistically through the long take, especially in *Cronaca di un amore*, remains to be observed in close detail. Therefore, the following paragraphs aim to address this question with reference to particular examples from the film.

The distinguishing feature of the physical environments that surround the characters throughout the film is their notable emptiness. Paola and Guido are often presented as lone figures, disconnected from any sense of daily life taking place in and around the city. Shiel points out that Antonioni highlights the 'austere rationalist architecture' of the city within the shots and he observes that 'Antonioni's Milan is a rainy, dreary, industrial one ... predominantly characterised by an unnerving emptiness and anonymity and a lack of social energy and human warmth, especially in the depopulated marginal spaces where Guido and Paola secretly meet' (Shiel 2006: 101). This becomes apparent in the scene previously described, where Guido waits for Paola beside a huge playing field that is largely empty, situated on a quiet road where Paola's car is the only moving vehicle. In the next scene, the two characters arrive at the vast, deserted Idroscalo on the outskirts of the city, where

⁷ See Brunette's opening remarks in his introduction to *The Films of Michelangelo Antonioni* (Brunette 1998: 1-2). See, also, Rascaroli and Rhodes's introduction to their collection (Rascaroli and Rhodes 2011: 7-8) and Matilda Mroz's discussion of *L'avventura* in *Temporality and Film Analysis* (Mroz 2012: 51).

there are no other people or signs of any life, only the inhuman concrete structures and the still waters of the lake that stretch into the horizon. Later they meet at a darkened auditorium before walking through the lonely, rain-soaked gardens outside, where only one or two other figures are present in the space. This pattern culminates in the couple's final meeting before the accident at the end of the film, where they arrive on a bridge overlooking the canal and largely deserted road beside it. In these scenes, and elsewhere in the film, Antonioni emphasises the empty space surrounding the characters through the long take and its deep-focus framing. He does not exclude this dead space by focusing-in on Guido and Paola, isolating them from the wider environment. Rather, he reveals their isolation and alienation by placing them firmly within these deserted locations. The uninhabited spaces that the characters gravitate towards, and are seemingly unable to escape, mark their retreat from any sense of community and their alienation from human contact or communication.

Following the neorealist filmmakers of the immediate post-war years, Antonioni is concerned to document not only the physical landscape but also the social world surrounding the individual protagonists. But the society of Antonioni's film is different to that of Rossellini's *Paisà* or De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*. *Cronaca di un amore* deals with the social environment of Italy's post-war economic boom.⁸ Using the long take, Antonioni constructs his characters in relation to this social and economic environment, and he also emphasises how the characters' positions within the expanding materialist, capitalist structure affects their inner, psychological states. In the earlier neorealist films the characters were also shown to be alienated by their environments, but this alienation was fundamentally material in nature: a war-zone

⁸ For discussions of Antonioni's cinema in relation to this historical context see P. Adams Sitney's *Vital Crises in Italian Cinema: Iconography, Stylistic, Politics* (Sitney 1995: 144-171), *The Films of Michelangelo Antonioni* (Brunette 1998: 6-8) and Rhodes's 'Antonioni and the Development of Style' (Rhodes 2011: 276-300).

where structures of social cohesion and communication have been destroyed, or a district of slums where the poor must steal from each other to survive. In *Cronaca di un amore*, the protagonists do not face such physical alienation, wrought on them by the surrounding social environment, but rather a more existential crisis. Antonioni's emphasis on the landscape within the long take is used, in particular, to create a contrast between Guido's and Paola's social positions.⁹ But it is these different social settings that equally cause the psychological angst that is experienced by both characters.

The contrasts between Guido's surroundings and Paola's are made apparent from their initial encounter outside the opera house, which is also the first time both characters are introduced in the film. Paola is shown first in a long take that follows her leaving the opera after a performance, where she is met by her husband and a group of friends. The first feature of the *mise en scène* that becomes particularly significant is her costume. Paola wears a luxurious white fur coat, which makes her stand out brightly against darkness of the street. This is accompanied by a set of lavish, diamond-encrusted earrings and necklace, which sparkle against the surrounding darkness. The excessive luxury of her costume even differentiates her from the other well-dressed characters, who appear modest by comparison. When she and her husband separate from the group we learn that he has forgotten her birthday, but attempts to make up for this by asking what present he can buy her. It is at this point that Paola's attention is caught by something off-screen and Antonioni cuts to a reverse-angle long shot that introduces Guido. Here the social contrast between the two protagonists becomes stark. Where Paola's luxurious costume indicates her

⁹ Ian Cameron notes the 'overt social content' of *Cronaca di un amore*, arguing that the film 'centres on the social barriers between a girl of working-class background who has married money, and her lover who has remained poor' (Cameron and Wood 1968: 34).

attachment to wealth (and the purely economic basis of her relationship with Enrico), Guido wears a plain, dark overcoat, which makes him blend into the darkness of the background.

More significantly, Antonioni's camera emphasises the locations that surround the characters in the shots, and these also reflect the social contrasts between the couple. Guido is framed below a large billboard advertisement that dwarfs him in an otherwise empty space. This visual alienation also reflects his vulnerable economic position more generally. Paola, by contrast, is framed by the grand façade of the opera house, a symbol of wealth and opulence. But despite the different spaces that surround the characters, Antonioni reveals a similarity in their affect on the psychological state of each character. The pillars of the opera house entrance tower over Paola, much like the billboard above Guido. Thus, from the start, the characters are shown in relation to the social structures that surround them. While there is an external contrast between Paola's and Guido's positions, each is shown to weigh heavily on them, showing their isolation by the alternative social forces. Chatman writes that 'both characters are enveloped by the banality of quotidian life – Paola by a meaningless luxury and Guido by a no less meaningless poverty. The meaninglessness of social difference and sexual jealousy are two mainsprings of the plot' (Chatman 1985: 17). But what is most significant for this analysis is the way that Antonioni reveals these meanings while preserving spatial integrity, placing characters within the wider landscape. Thus, the physical relations between elements of the *mise en scène* within the shot also reflect the psychological alienation forced on Guido and Paola by their social environments.

Antonioni develops these issues further in a number of scenes that follow. After Paola leaves the opera house she returns home with Enrico and the film moves

to the next scene in her bedroom, which is filmed in a single long take. Paola sits in front of a large mirror removing her makeup and preparing to go to bed. Enrico then enters the room and they have a discussion about a business associate offering to buy Paola, which he finds amusing, yet is less humorous to her. The first notable feature of the *mise en scène* is, again, her extravagant costume: a fur-sleeved silk dressing gown. However, what is more significant in the shot is the various details of the décor. The camera's initial position frames Paola within these various details of the space, notably the large oval mirror in front of her, but also the curtain that surrounds the dressing area, and the numerous bottles of cosmetics that litter her dressing table. All these objects clutter the space, making it appear enclosed, almost claustrophobic. We then see Enrico enter the room and he is also framed within the mirror. The physical relations between the elements of the shot in this first part of the scene emphasise Paola's sense of isolation and entrapment within her surrounding wealth and her loveless marriage with Enrico.



Fig. 2.3 *Cronaca di un amore* (1950)

In the second part of the scene, these ideas are further suggested by the conversation between the two characters. The way Enrico discusses Paola, he reduces her to another mere object that can be bought for the right price. She proposes the idea about the Eastern prince as a counter to her husband's materialistic view of life. Unlike the businessman, the prince is not motivated by money, but rather by deeper concerns such as honour and love, things that cannot be measured materially. However, Enrico fails to see the point that Paola makes. Thus, as Shiel notes, 'Paola is acutely aware of her alienation, recognising her status as just another commodity for her husband' (Shiel 2006: 102). This is also reflected visually in the scene through the composition of the shot. For the conversation, the camera pulls back into a wider angle that frames Enrico sitting in a chair beside the dressing table where Paola remains seated. The camera observes the entire conversation from the same fixed position, showing both characters as they talk. Their separation becomes notable, with a gap between Paola's stool and Enrico's armchair. Furthermore, they face in different directions and rarely look at each other. The camera's position also allows us to observe their different reactions; while Enrico laughs, treating the conversation in a light-hearted manner, Paola remains serious and unamused, showing her disregard for her husband and his obsession with wealth. The emotional separation between the characters is further suggested by a physical separation in the shot when Paola gets up and moves away from her husband, going to the bathroom on the other side of the room. The camera pans round to follow her as she moves away into the depth of the shot, while Enrico enters in the foreground, remaining on the edge of the screen, watching her at a distance.

The later scene that takes place in Guido's apartment is in marked contrast to the luxury of Enrico and Paola's home, reflecting his social and economic failure that

is the source of his psychological alienation. At the start of the shot, Guido is framed within the doorway, surrounded by the bare walls and darkness of his small apartment. Like the scene discussed above, décor becomes a significant feature of the shot. Before Antonioni reveals Paola's presence, the camera follows Guido walking around his apartment, showing him in relation to his surroundings. These differ entirely from the surroundings of Paola's room in the earlier sequence. Rather than the clutter of objects and decorations, Guido's apartment is bare. Also, the high-key lighting of the earlier sequence is contrasted here by darkness and strong, directional shadows. Moving away from the door, Guido briefly pauses to look in the mirror of his own, much more modest, dressing table. These elements all emphasise both his physical and psychological alienation, though not in the claustrophobic opulence of wealth, like Paola, but in the bleakness of his meagre, drifter's existence. The emphasis on Guido's social isolation, and its psychological effects, is further reflected in the next part of the scene when the couple discuss Paola's lost earring. Guido's dismissive response to Paola's comment that the earrings are 'only cheap' shows his deep sense of disillusionment about his lack of money. Sitting forward on the bed to look for the earring he refers to the apartment as a 'hole'. Guido's comment describes the physical shoddiness of the room that we can observe in the shot thanks to the deep focus and camera movement. But it also refers to the effect of his environment on a deeper level, pointing to Guido's feelings about his general social situation; he is, so to speak, trapped in a hole. As Guido makes the comment, he moves his head forward and it becomes shrouded in shadow, which visually rhymes with his comment to further suggest the psychologically alienating effect of his physical and social environment.



Fig. 2.4 *Cronaca di un amore* (1950)

By utilising the long take, Antonioni is therefore able to elaborate some of the film's central psychological concerns through the relation between character and environment. By placing Paola and Guido in their particular surroundings, both physical and socio-economic, Antonioni explores how his characters' interior condition, their sense of alienation, is shaped by the external world they inhabit. Maintaining the wholeness of the action and the space in which it takes place within the long take means that the world depicted in *Cronaca di un amore* has a notable density. Visual details become meaningful in relation to the social and psychological issues examined in the film. However, the space depicted within the long take retains its physical presence; the concrete existence of objects and their relations are not disturbed through editing, which allows a greater degree of spatial realism.

Objectivity and Ambiguity

The emphasis on spatial wholeness and the presence of the surrounding landscape within the long take makes Antonioni's presentation of the events in *Cronaca di un amore* notably objective and ambiguous in nature, which further builds on the aesthetic approach of neorealism. As Shiel writes, the film's 'distinctive realism of visual form' is accompanied by a 'realism of event and information' (Shiel 2006: 101). He points out that the film consists of 'a series of actions and pieces of information only loosely organised and barely explained as if captured from real life with a minimum of directorial intervention or commentary' (Shiel 2006: 98). This narrative approach is shaped, largely, by Antonioni's use of the long take. Throughout the film, the shots present significant narrative developments in a neutral and reticent manner, largely as a result of their refusal to isolate and link salient details within the *mise en scène* through analytical editing. As Chatman writes, Antonioni's long-take deep-focus style 'extends the visual field in all its axes and rejects shock close-ups on faces and significant objects' (Chatman 1985: 21). As a result, ambiguity becomes a prevalent feature of the events and, as Shiel suggests, 'the viewer's ability to follow [the story] is constantly challenged by Antonioni's refusal to fully explain his characters' origins, motivations and actions' (Shiel 2006: 98). Using the long take, Antonioni leaves the spectator to determine the significant details relating to the development of the plot from the entirety of the space and action presented in the shot.

This objectivity and ambiguity introduced by the long take becomes apparent in relation to the events that comprise the most significant actions in the film, namely the two deaths that torment Guido and Paola. The past event of Giovanna's death is recounted through the investigation in the first part of the film. Like the example from

The Maltese Falcon, discussed in chapter one, the film revolves around the detective's acquisition and analysis of important information. However, our attention is not aligned with Carloni's point of view through analytical editing, as it is with Spade's in the earlier film. Instead, Carloni is most often framed by the camera within the location, together with the other witnesses, in a single shot. Thus, his discovery of the circumstances surrounding Giovanna's death is not emphasised by the camera or editing and Antonioni forces us to actively search the action to identify this information.

Carloni begins his investigation with a visit to Paola's old school. The shot begins on the school headmaster and then pulls back to bring the detective into the shot. The remaining part of the sequence is played out in this single long shot. Much of the discussion does not seem to reveal any information that would contribute to Carloni's investigation of Paola's past. Antonioni even includes a momentary detour, when the headmaster starts to discuss his talent for sharpening pencils. When the other teacher arrives, who does offer information about Paola, the camera moves away from the men rather than closer in, avoiding any particular emphasis. But what the teacher says does offer some initial indications about Paola's character. When he is first reminded of her, his initial thought is of her physical beauty: 'ah Paola Molon ... pretty girl'. Thus, the scene hints at the idea that Paola is sexually appealing to men. This is initially suggested in the very first shot of the film, a close-up on several photographs of Paola, and it is Enrico's jealousy over his wife's sexual appeal to other men that motivates him to pursue the investigation. The teacher also reveals other suggestive information, notably when he says that Paola was 'a bit restive', suggesting that she may not be disposed to settled life. But the sequence does not emphasise these pieces of information through editing. Instead, the scene is presented

in a single shot, giving this information as much weight as the headmaster's insignificant comments about pencils.

In the next scene, the neutral presentation of the long take is further exemplified. It is here that information about Giovanna's death is first revealed when Carloni visits Paola's old tennis coach at a club where she used to play. In the two shots that comprise the scene, Antonioni frames the men within the wider environment rather than employing a shot/reverse-shot sequence of close-ups to focus on their discussion. Carloni asks what happened to Paola following the death and the old man tells him that she vanished, noting that it was strange she disappeared so suddenly. Antonioni's handling of the discussion, using the long take, acts to de-emphasise the information that is revealed. This is the first moment where some mystery and uncertainty surrounding Paola's past is indicated, information that will lead to the major developments later in the film. Yet, the sequence is presented with a certain degree of restraint. Antonioni does not utilise editing for dramatic emphasis; instead, he allows the information to emerge in a rather understated fashion, where it is not distinguished in the shot from the other, insignificant comments that make up the conversation.

The final meeting in Carloni's initial investigation is handled in a similar fashion as the previous scenes. He arrives at the apartment of the friend who then informs Guido about the detective in a letter. Here the detective does not find the friend but, instead, her husband. The camera follows the husband around the room as Carloni questions him. He informs Carloni that Paola was in love with Guido and that Giovanna died two days before they were due to marry. The scene thus builds on the previous meetings, revealing further information about Paola's past. Specifically, the circumstances surrounding the death of Giovanna are revealed, including the

husband's disclosure of the illicit relationship between Paola and Guido and their separation after the death. However, as before, Antonioni chooses not to emphasise the revelation of this information through editing and close-ups. The camera follows the husband's movements around the apartment in his dressing gown, allowing us to notice the details of the surroundings: the darkened lighting, the piles of books and the wood burner that the husband fills with paper to heat the room. When the husband reveals that Giovanna died two days before the wedding, Carloni turns around to face the man, allowing a clearer view of his facial expression. His gesture suggests that he has discovered something of potential significance; he may begin to suspect that Paola and Guido killed Giovanna so that they could be together. But the revelation is not emphasised; Antonioni refuses to provide a close-up of Carloni's face as he registers the information, which would more clearly signal its narrative importance. Instead, the long take covers the action in the same way as the husband's insignificant wanderings around the room.

The film returns to the investigation when Carloni visits the apartment block where the accident took place. In the hallway he meets a maid who works for Giovanna's family and was present at the accident. She recounts how the accident took place, indicating that Guido and Paola were present when Giovanna died. The woman reveals the initial passive reactions of the couple after the girl fell; she tells Carloni that Guido and Paola were standing by the door and that she had to prompt him to run down to find her, but she was already dead. Furthermore, the maid recounts Paola's subsequent violent outburst, shouting at Guido hysterically and telling him that she did not want to see him again. As she says this, Carloni turns and lifts his head slightly to look at the old woman, indicating his interest in her description of Paola's actions. These details appear to further implicate Paola and

Guido in the death, prompting the detective to suspect that they actually murdered Giovanna. But Antonioni's handling of the scene, as in the previous investigations, does not draw particular attention to the information presented. Instead, the camera is held back, framing both characters' full figures in a single, fixed shot for the entire scene. The film does not cut in to close-ups of the old woman when she reveals information about the event. Neither do we see close-ups of Carloni as he registers what is said, though the camera does perform a slight forward movement at the very end of the shot, pointing to his continuing suspicions about the couple. The overall impression created through Antonioni's use of the long take in this and the preceding investigation scenes, however, is one of restrained objectivity and uncertainty regarding the truth about the past death.



Fig. 2.5 *Cronaca di un amore* (1950)

Antonioni's objective presentation of the investigation stems from his emphasis on spatial wholeness in the scenes, preserving the physical relations

between all elements of the *mise en scène* through the long take; no particular details are extracted from their surroundings, or highlighted at the expense of the other details present in the space. As such, the minor actions and tangential remarks in the various discussions remain present in the scenes, and are presented with the same degree of dramatic weight as the more significant pieces of information that are revealed. Furthermore, the environments surrounding the characters remain a prominent feature of the shots, and we are given the freedom to turn our attention away from the central action to examine these spaces and their constituent details. The quality of wholeness that Antonioni achieves through the long take in these scenes also weakens the causal development of the investigation, the progression of one piece of information leading to another in order to form a coherent account of Paola's past and, specifically, the death of Giovanna. The multiplicity of other details that Antonioni includes in the scenes, largely due to his avoidance of analytical editing, work to dilute and divert from the chain of causality in which the detective comes to understand what has happened. As a result, the long takes also foster a greater degree of ambiguity around the investigation because important details are not emphasised by the film. Our attention is not guided by the editing to significant information relating to the accident. Instead, Antonioni leaves the spectator to actively identify and interpret the revelations from the wider action of the scenes.

The death of Enrico at the end of the film is depicted with a similar degree of reticence as the investigation revolving around Giovanna's death at the start. The film focuses on Guido as he prepares to kill Enrico and only provides a limited perspective of the accident. Guido arrives at the quiet, rural road, where the couple have arranged that he will shoot Enrico. He then steps forward as the sound of an approaching vehicle is heard from off-screen, and he reaches into his pocket for the gun. A car

speeds past him and he steps back out of the road, sighing in relief; it was not Enrico. The camera then follows him away from the road, to his previous hiding position when there is a sudden loud explosion from further down the road. Guido looks into the distance, then turns and lights a cigarette. As he does so, there is yet another crash in the distance. Guido looks again, this time more intently, at which point the shot cuts to his point of view, showing a light in the far distance that is barely noticeable.¹⁰ Returning to the reverse angle, we see Guido collect his bicycle and he cycles out of shot towards the action in the distance.

It is only in the next shot, when the film cuts to the action in the distance, that Enrico's accident is revealed. Here, the camera pans across the body as two men drag it from the wreckage and the shot settles on Guido when he arrives and sees that Enrico is dead. Thus, as Chatman summarises, 'the impact is strangely muted ... instead of a dramatic close-up on the crash – screeching brakes, spinning wheels, fiery explosion, and so on – Antonioni shoots the accident from Guido's point of view a mile down the road' (Chatman 1985: 15). It is not until after the accident that we learn what has happened and, even at this point, Antonioni's camera refuses to emphasise the event, simply panning across from the wreckage of the car to show Enrico's body lying, barely visible, in the darkness as two witnesses identify him. Furthermore, there remains a significant degree of ambiguity around the accident itself. As Shiel notes, 'the dramatic encounter never happens, we never know what Enrico was thinking just before he died, why his vehicle spun off the road, or what he intended to do when he arrived home to Paola' (Shiel 2006: 100). Instead of providing some clarity on these questions through shots of Enrico's reaction and the car's movement on the road, the

¹⁰ This is one of the few moments in the film where Antonioni resorts to conventional point-of-view cutting.

camera instead remains on Guido in a long take as he does very little, standing beside the road, waiting for Enrico to arrive.

The objective and ambiguous treatment of the events in the long take, demonstrated most clearly in relation to the film's two deaths, marks Antonioni's development of the neorealist aesthetic pioneered in *Paisà*, though he utilises this approach in relation to quite different situations. And in *Cronaca di un amore*, this manner of presenting the events also relates directly to Antonioni's concern with the psychological state of the protagonists. Shiel writes that 'the alienation which haunts Paola and Guido is not only that of the present of modern urban Italy – it is also a haunting of that present by a dark secret from the recent past' (Shiel 2006: 103). The angst of the two characters is caused not only by the surrounding socio-economic environment, but also by the guilt over Giovanna's death and, as the film progresses, their plan to murder Enrico. Rather than presenting dramatic events (a crime of passion committed by the protagonists that provokes the genuine threat of punishment), the film explores the psychological and moral alienation that Paola and Guido are suffering, which ultimately finds no resolve in direct physical action. As Chatman points out, the film is concerned with 'the guilt, fear, and anxiety that seem to persist whether the danger that they are facing is real or not ... the couple do not actually cause the two deaths; they only wish for them' (Chatman 1985: 12). The complexity surrounding the extent to which Guido and Paola are implicated in, and responsible for, the death of Giovanna and then of Enrico becomes the central concern of the film. Antonioni's impassive presentation of the investigation and the final accident, through the long take, becomes a strategy for shifting interest away from external, physical actions, to the purely psychological nature of the drama. The film's treatment of the events is thus in marked contrast to the way the characters perceive

them; it is clear that Paola and Guido (and perhaps, mistakenly, Carloni) treat the situation as though they really did commit the crimes, and the couple act as if they are in real danger of punishment.

Elaborating on these ideas, Kovács suggests that there is a sense of ‘nothing’ at the centre of the film, where the characters’ psychological concerns have no grounding in real, physical action. He points out that, unlike the traditional crime thriller, in *Cronaca di un amore* the investigation creates the situation, rather than responding to it. Kovács writes: ‘the most interesting thing in *Story*’s narrative is that it starts out of “nothing at all.” There is no basis for the husband’s jealousy’ (Kovács 2007: 258). It is because of the investigation, which Enrico initiates simply to find out more about his wife, that the accident is discovered; this brings Guido and Paola together again, which leads to their love affair, which then leads to the plan to murder Enrico. Furthermore, the investigation appears to cause Enrico’s death, though not by murder; his seeming distress, provoked by Carloni’s report on the lovers, is the likely trigger of his fatal accident (though this is not stressed in the film). There is a clear distinction, therefore, between the psychological crisis experienced by the characters and the physical accidents that take place around them. Kovács notes that ‘the sin is only committed mentally, not physically ... nothing is done, everything is imagined and wished, and imagination and wishes come to pass through accidents’ (Kovács 2007: 258-259). The characters are only guilty of a moral ‘crime’, he suggests, because they wish for the deaths without physically causing them. Kovács’s insightful observations on the distinction between the physical and mental dimensions depicted in the film can be put into dialogue with Antonioni’s stylistic presentation of the events. The long take emphasises this distinction by marginalising the deaths both visually and dramatically, while focussing instead on the inactive deliberations of the

couple. Therefore, Antonioni becomes concerned with Paola's and Guido's mental responses to their situation, instead of physical acts.

For this reason, the film is more interested to show Guido's behaviour in the moments leading up to the accident in which Enrico dies. The camera remains with him by the side of the road as he walks up and down, looking around to make sure he cannot be seen by any possible witnesses, revealing his mental state as he prepares to kill the man. The lengthy shots of Guido standing by the side of the darkened road are also cross-cut with long takes that follow Paola around her bedroom back in the city as she paces around, waiting anxiously for Guido's call. Antonioni's treatment of the scene, using the long take to focus on the two separate protagonists in the build-up to the accident, while refusing to show the actual crash itself, thus emphasises the separation between the physical event of the death (which is only a chance accident) and the couple's fear and guilt surrounding their resolve to kill Enrico. It is this purely psychological trauma that ultimately forces the couple apart once more immediately after the accident, even though they do not physically commit the murder.

It is not only in relation to the deaths, which mark the film's beginning and end, where the characters' psychological angst is emphasised over any external action. Throughout the film, Antonioni's camera observes the various meetings between Paola and Guido, where they discuss what happened in the past and what they would like to happen in the future. In these scenes, the camera follows the characters in mobile long takes, which capture their brooding, restless, aimless movements that lead nowhere, while they confront their inner fears and guilt about the deaths. But Antonioni's objective approach remains a dominant feature of the shots in these scenes, maintaining our distance from the characters. He does not utilise close-ups and cutting to align us with the protagonists and their point of view. Instead,

through the long take, the film watches the couple dispassionately, rendering their movements within the surrounding environment as they reveal their thoughts through the dialogue.

The two scenes that take place in Guido's apartment demonstrate this pattern most clearly, the first of which was already introduced in the previous section of this chapter. After the exchange about the earring, Paola and Guido speak about Giovanna's death, and how they could have stopped it if they warned her the lift was broken. Guido says 'at that moment we wished her death ... we really wanted it, I wonder if that's a crime'. As he considers his guilt, Guido gets off the bed and walks over to the far side of the room, the camera tilting up to keep him in shot while Paola remains on the bed. Paola then responds anxiously: 'no, we didn't do anything, there was no crime'. She approaches Guido to calm him down and the camera tracks forward to frame the characters in a long shot. The conversation then turns from Giovanna to Enrico, as Guido points out that there is again someone keeping them apart. This provokes Paola to suggest that if Enrico were dead then they could be together. Guido is visibly disturbed by her comments and proceeds to move around the apartment, collecting his jumper and jacket to leave, as she tries to console him once more. He tells her: 'don't you see where we're going? And with that man tailing us its no joke'. Guido then leaves the room and the scene ends as Paola lies sobbing on the bed. There is a notable discrepancy in the scene between the characters' anxious movements around the room and the camera's restrained depiction of the action; it tracks and pans to follow their movements without dramatically emphasising their reactions. As we follow their aimless back-and-forth movements from one part of the room to the other, we also witness the development of their thoughts, as they progress from Giovanna's death to the idea of Enrico's death. The mere idea of this

provokes Guido to react very fearfully, even though no action has taken place and they have not yet outwardly suggested murdering him. No physical threat exists, yet his mental reaction is intense. The camera does not emphasise his reactions however, remaining at some distance and avoiding any dramatic editing.

The film's depiction of the characters' psychological angst is then further reflected on Paola's second visit to the apartment, where she more insistently raises the thought of Enrico's death, and she suggests that Guido could kill him. She menacingly places her hands around his neck to simulate a strangling action and he looks at her anxiously, before he forcibly removes her hands. She then suggests that he could shoot Enrico, walking up and down the room between the foreground and the background of the shot. When Guido confronts her angrily she says that she is only joking and the lovers then embrace as the scene ends. Here, the plan to murder Enrico is not definite and his death remains just a thought. Antonioni is interested, however, in the responses of the two characters to the idea of murdering him. Nothing happens in the scene except for their psychological deliberations. And this is reflected by the long take as it impassively follows their aimless movements up and down the space. Perez notes that in this scene there is a discrepancy 'between the drama being enacted ... and the perspective being adopted by the camera', where we remain at a distance from the characters 'at the very moments of emotional intensity, moments when we would have expected the camera to dramatize that intensity with a closer view' (Perez 1998: 89). As such, the long take reveals the anxious reactions of the couple, but it does not emphasise this or encourage us to share their angst. Instead the effect is notably objective and even ambiguous to the extent that it is unclear whether the couple have, indeed, resolved to act on their desires and to kill Enrico.

Form and Abstraction

Antonioni's development of the neorealist long-take aesthetic in *Cronaca di un amore* does not mark an unproblematic elaboration of Bazin's notions about realism in the earlier filmmakers' work. In contrast to Rossellini and De Sica, Antonioni's long take is complicated by an equal concern for visual abstraction within the shot. Therefore, the Bazinian interpretation of the long take does not provide a comprehensive understanding of the technique as Antonioni uses it in this film, and we must look beyond the earlier critic's observations to fully account for its presence in *Cronaca di un amore*. Unlike the rough, casual relationship between the camera and the events it captures in *Paisà* or *Bicycle Thieves*, Antonioni's film demonstrates a more rigorous attention to the arrangement of space within the frame. The emphasis on stylistic abstraction is one of the most conspicuous features of critical responses to Antonioni's cinema. Kolker writes of Antonioni's shots that 'we see objects, tonalities, and relationships in these images that we would be unable to see in ordinary experience', and he concludes that 'in short, Antonioni is a formalist ... He invents images rather than records them. Even though he films on location and uses long takes, what the camera eye sees is not the physical reflection of a "real world"' (Kolker 1983: 149). Similarly, Chatman identifies what he calls Antonioni's 'flat "abstract" style': 'the visual framing that becomes more designlike and in that sense more abstract', in which 'actors and settings seem more than ever to have been juxtaposed for visual purposes' (Chatman 1985: 118). For Chatman, Antonioni's films 'glory in the lines and masses of plane geometry', where 'characters are frequently pinned to walls' and the screen is 'elegantly divided by a vertical line or two' (Chatman 1985: 119). Brunette also notes Antonioni's 'rigorous formalism', arguing that 'Antonioni's films are much more formal, graphic experiences ... than

they are typical film stories' (Brunette 1998: 10-11). Echoing these critics' observations, David Forgacs further emphasises that 'of directors working in mainstream cinema, as opposed to experimental or avant-garde film-makers, Antonioni must be reckoned one of the most relentlessly abstract in his treatment of space' (Forgacs 2000: 101). These critical observations are directed largely at Antonioni's most famous films of the 1960s, and it is true to say that during that period his cinema did reach a heightened visual abstraction that exceeded that of his earlier work.¹¹ However, we can see this emphasis on visual abstraction emerging already in *Cronaca di un amore* in a number of the film's long takes. This does not invalidate the realist qualities of the film, as the previous sections of this chapter have stressed, and Bazin's insights still remain relevant to its long takes, even if he does not fully account for them. Antonioni introduces a prominent formalist concern into his filmmaking, but does so without sacrificing the emphasis on the integral realism of the scene that he adapts from neorealism.

As the comments of those critics cited above suggest, Antonioni's visual abstraction is demonstrated most prominently through composition. He pays close attention to the arrangement of lines, blocks and shading within the frame to create a rigorously geometric image within the shot. This is often associated with flatness, as Antonioni reduces the natural depth of the space before the camera, turning it into a picture plane in a similar way to abstract painting. However, Antonioni also utilises deep-focus composition to create abstract framings, and this method is particularly evident in *Cronaca di un amore*. The depth of field provided by the long take allows Antonioni to compose the elements of the *mise en scène* in striking patterns.

¹¹ This increasing abstraction also goes hand-in-hand with a greater use of editing and the deployment of false continuity and point of view. For example, see *The Material Ghost* (Perez 1998: 377).

Throughout the film, Antonioni arranges the compositions with bold, straight lines crossing the screen either diagonally or vertically, moving away into the depth of the shot. This is demonstrated when Paola picks up Guido beside the playing field and the camera pans to observe them drive away along the road into the distance. The line of trees, running along the concrete wall beside the road forms a bold geometric pattern that is also met with the line created by the road edge. A similar variation of this compositional pattern is demonstrated when Enrico tests the Maserati that Guido hopes to sell him. The image fades from the nightclub where the characters meet to a deserted road outside the city. The lines of the road shoot diagonally across the screen endlessly into the background while two large liqueur bottles stand either side of the road in the middle of the shot. The space is entirely empty other than the small lights of the Maserati as it races towards the camera. And only once it reaches the foreground does the camera tilt down to reveal Guido.

The most extraordinary example of Antonioni's geometrically abstract composition within the long take is demonstrated at the couple's first meeting when they go to the Idroscalo. The camera follows them as they exit the car and walk towards the edge of the enormous, manmade lake. As they reach the lakeside, the camera reveals a line of large concrete steps that stretch far off diagonally into the depth of the shot. Guido then walks around Paola, stepping down towards the lake and turns around to look back up at her. The line of the steps is now framed clearly between them as Guido asks Paola if she is happy. She does not answer, instead walking down the steps towards the water, her back turned to Guido. At this moment the composition becomes increasingly startling, as both characters stand in the foreground of the shot with their backs to the camera, while the remaining space of the shot is dominated by the steps that stretch endlessly into the distance. Here, and in

the previous examples, the presence of the environment, which Antonioni is able to incorporate through his use of the long take and deep focus, allows him to compose the frame in striking geometric patterns. Thus, while the long take preserves the physical integrity of the space, Antonioni also calls attention to the presence of the camera and, by extension, to the formal act of composition itself.



Fig. 2.6 *Cronaca di un amore* (1950)

The emphasis on composition should not detract, however, from the constant shifts in action and *mise en scène* that form an important part of Antonioni's long-take style. The continuity of action as the scene unfolds is the central distinguishing feature of the long take and, in *Cronaca di un amore*, Antonioni pursues this stylistic possibility extensively. In her discussion of *L'avventura*, Mroz questions the emphasis on stillness in critical discussions of Antonioni's visual abstraction. She writes: 'such analyses tend to detach images from the temporal flow and movement of

the film' and asks 'whether stillness and flatness are the most adequate ways of characterising the film's images' (Mroz 2012: 52). For Mroz 'the emphasis upon flatness, surface and abstraction in writing on Antonioni tends to obscure the strategies of depth and the film's fluid mobility' (Mroz 2012: 54). Though Mroz's comments are focussed on *L'avventura*, her argument is equally valid for *Cronaca di un amore*, with its fluidly shifting camera movements and choreographic staging that characterise the long takes. The stylistic abstraction that Antonioni stresses in the film relates not only to the momentary composition of space within the frame, but also to the movement of the camera through this space.

Earlier in this chapter we saw that camera movement in the long take promotes a greater sense of spatial realism in the film by accentuating the three-dimensionality and density of the surrounding environment, placing us within the location and exploring its various details. This remains a significant quality of the mobile long takes in the film, but on the other hand, the movement of the camera also calls attention to itself; we are therefore led not only to see the space through which the camera moves but also to recognise the very movement, and so the presence of the camera itself. In an early discussion of the film, Noël Burch observes that 'Antonioni creates a relationship between his characters as they speak and his camera as it records them speaking, which can best be described as a *ballet*. It is a ballet, moreover, of an unprecedented complexity and rigor' (Burch 1973: 76-77). Burch notes the 'equally stylised' movements of figures and camera that establishes a balletic relationship 'between the actors and the evolving spatial area as defined by the camera', and he argues that 'this constant recomposition of the film's space is its essentially plastic characteristic' (Burch 1973: 77). Here, the mobile frame becomes a prominent feature of stylistic abstraction within the shot.



Fig. 2.7 *Cronaca di un amore* (1950)

The rigorously stylised movements of the camera are demonstrated in many scenes throughout the film. The example introduced earlier in the chapter, when Paola awaits Guido's phone call as she moves around the social club, is one notable instance where the shifting movement of figures and camera in the space becomes overt. However, the most extraordinary example of Antonioni's measured camera movement within the long take, which is also combined with an emphasis on geometric compositions, is the final meeting between Paola and Guido before the murder. The scene takes place on a bridge crossing a large canal somewhere outside the city and here they plan how the murder will be carried out. The scene is filmed in a single long take where the camera performs a complete circular movement around the space to settle on the area where the shot began. The frame moves, pauses, then moves and pauses again several times, while also following the two characters as they, likewise, move and pause. As the scene progresses, the camera also settles at

several moments on striking visual compositions that place the characters in relation to the surrounding landscape. Antonioni frames the couple against the lines of the canal below, which run endlessly into the distance on both sides of the bridge, thus reflecting the compositional pattern that he deploys frequently throughout the preceding scenes. But it is the mobility of frame, shifting from one rigorously composed image to the next, following the characters' restless wanderings, and emphasising the presence of the camera within the space, which becomes most conspicuous in this sequence shot.

Antonioni's tendency towards stylistic abstraction within the long take in *Cronaca di un amore* is another feature that he utilises to depict the psychological alienation of the characters created by their surroundings. The geometric framing and camera movements allow the images to become suggestive of Guido and Paola's situation and reflect their sense of angst surrounding the two deaths in the film, while maintaining the physical integrity of the scenes. This becomes especially significant in the two meetings that take place beside the lake and on the bridge, where Antonioni's visual abstraction is most evident. Chatman suggests of the earlier scene that the lines of the steps beside the lake, which stretch off into the depth of the shot, 'seem to imply a limitless future together if they can only muster the energy and courage to break away from the past' (Chatman 1985: 17). I am inclined, however, to read this composition in a different way. Rather than a 'limitless future', the lines appear to suggest the impossibility of any such redemptive move. They lead to nowhere; there is no destination at the end, only emptiness. These ideas become yet more pronounced in the later meeting on the bridge, as the couple now plan the murder of Enrico. Chatman more accurately writes of this scene that the composition 'suggests not promise but the pointlessness of everything', noting how the panning of

the camera reveals the lines of the canal stretching away in both directions, emphasising the 'meaninglessness' of the 'empty distance' on both sides, a 'moral wasteland' surrounding the characters (Chatman 1985: 18). To add to Chatman's comments, we can also see that the camera movement becomes especially significant, connecting both sides of the canal, connecting past and present, Giovanna's death with Enrico's. Furthermore, the circular motion of the frame follows the characters so that they end the sequence in the same place where they started. The murder plan that they hope will allow them to escape their situation will in fact bring them full-circle, back to the separation that marked their relationship at the beginning of the film.

As these observations suggest, there thus arises a notable tension in *Cronaca di un amore* between realism and formalism in the long take. On the one hand, the technique rejects the spatio-temporal abstractions of analytical editing by preserving the integrity of the scene, and it allows the surrounding environment to become equally present to our attention. On the other hand, the spatial integrity and depth of field offered by the extended shot allows Antonioni the opportunity to compose the frame in highly organised ways, emphasising geometric patterns of lines and surfaces. Furthermore, the long take allows Antonioni to stage intricate movements of camera and actors, which draw attention to the shifting perception of space within the frame. The film does not invalidate Bazin's ideas; the long take still, inherently, captures the physical relations between the elements of the *mise en scène*, preserving the wholeness of the performances and the space that surrounds them, and allows us to experience the density of the world on screen. But Antonioni introduces another question that is largely absent from Bazin's writing and also from the neorealist films that he was responding to. His use of the long take stresses not only the physical presence of the events but also the perspective from which these events appear on the

screen. Thus, Antonioni emphasises the vital concern of the camera's presence in relation to the world. As Williams puts it, 'all Antonioni's works may thus be regarded as essays on the relation between reality and its perception' (Williams 2008: 52). This is precisely what happens in the long takes that comprise *Cronaca di un amore*. The tension between these two opposing tendencies in Antonioni's long take is, however, not an incongruity that sets this film apart from the broader pattern of long-take filmmaking in modern European cinema. In fact, what we find across these films is a pattern whereby photographic realism is put into a dialectical relationship with the heightened awareness of formal composition in the image; the long take emphasises not only the reality of the events on the screen, but also the presence of the camera in relation to this reality. It is the introduction of this latter dimension within the long take that marks the difference between the neorealist films of the immediate post-war period and the filmmakers that would rise to prominence over the course of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.¹² Furthermore, it was Antonioni's films in particular that would greatly influence many subsequent directors as they turned to the long take in these decades.

¹² This dialectic between realism and formalism will become evident in the subsequent films that are analysed in the following chapters of this thesis.

CHAPTER THREE:

CONTINUITY, INACTION AND TEMPORALITY

‘The direct time-image is the phantom which has always haunted the cinema, but it took modern cinema to give a body to this phantom’
(Gilles Deleuze 1989: 41)

This chapter turns from the issue of realism to questions of time in the long take, revolving around the ideas of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. In his two-volume study of the cinema published in the 1980s, Deleuze offers a new perspective on the issues that Bazin had discovered forty years earlier in the films of Welles and, more profoundly, in neorealism. As Jon Beasley-Murray points out, ‘Deleuze returns to a Bazinian notion of film *history* and a Bazinian conception of the *ontology* of the cinematic image’ (Beasley-Murray 1997: 38). Deleuze sees the developments of these filmmakers in a different light, however, emphasising their concern with cinema’s ability to present time. Even more so than Bazin’s notions of realism, Deleuze’s observations on time in modern cinema have come to be recognised as its most significant feature. Mark Betz, for example, writes that ‘time in modern European cinema is frequently held as the hallmark of its particular formal innovations in narration and storytelling’ (Betz 2009: 4). Deleuze’s books are guided by profoundly philosophical principles and concerns, working very much within the philosopher’s wider intellectual project.¹ This chapter will be focused more specifically, however, on the ways that Deleuze’s thinking develops and reinterprets Bazin’s observations on the long take, and how the technique reflects a cinematic practice that centres on the

¹ As Kovács notes in an essay outlining Deleuze’s film history: ‘one has to agree with the opinion of virtually all serious commentators on Deleuze that the purpose behind the two volumes this philosopher wrote on cinema is not purely film-theoretic, nor is it directed at the history of cinema. Rather, Deleuze turns to the cinema as a means of expression for certain philosophical problems he encounters’ (Kovács 2000: 153).

depiction of time.² In doing so, the chapter shall also attempt to address a limitation of Deleuze's work, which is his tendency to speak about films only in general terms, without reference to specific stylistic features or close sequence analysis to exemplify his conceptual ideas in practice. Thus, we may extend Deleuze's insights by observing, with greater attention to textual detail, how filmmakers pursued these temporal concerns through the long take.

Bergson and Duration

Deleuze's conception of time is indebted to the thinking of the French philosopher Henri Bergson and, therefore, it will be helpful to begin with a brief overview of Bergson's ideas. Bergson proposes the notion of duration (*durée*) as a conception of time that opposes our everyday system based on clock and calendar, which is infinitely divisible and measurable, and comprised of a series of still instants. By thinking of time in this way, Bergson argues, it is defined by space and becomes the measure of movement through space.³ For instance, the clock face is a spatial grid of segmented sections where time is measured by the movement of the clock's arms from one segment to the next.

Rather than this essentially abstract concept of temporality, Bergson argues that in duration we are able to grasp a sense of time that exists beyond any determination by movement and space; it can only be experienced directly and instinctually. In his essay 'Concerning the Nature of Time', first published in *Duration and Simultaneity* (1922) and reprinted in the collection *Henri Bergson: Key*

² For more detailed discussions of the philosophical influences and implications of Deleuze's cinema books in English see, for example: D.N. Rodowick's *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (1997), Roland Bogue's *Deleuze on Cinema* (2003) and Paola Marrati's *Gilles Deleuze: Cinema and Philosophy* (2008).

³ See 'The Idea of Duration', collected in *Henri Bergson: Key Writings* (Bergson 2002: 49-56). Originally published in *Time and Free Will* (1889).

Writings (2002), Bergson states that: ‘duration is essentially a continuation of what no longer exists into what does exist. This is real time, perceived and lived ... a time that endures’ (Bergson 2002: 208). For Bergson, duration is time that is felt, or ‘endured’, rather than measured. Furthermore, it is continually in the process of unfolding, whereas measured time assumes a retrospective organisation of something that has already unfolded, and a prospective organisation of something that is yet to unfold. Rather than a series of still instants, duration is sheer, undividable continuity, or as Bergson writes: ‘the continuation of what precedes into what follows and the uninterrupted transition, multiplicity without divisibility and succession without separation ... Such is immediately perceived duration, without which we would have no idea of time’ (Bergson 2002: 205).

To demonstrate his ideas, Bergson takes what he sees as the mistaken paradox of Zeno’s arrow. In *Creative Evolution* (originally published in 1907), Bergson states that, according to Zeno, the arrow is at every moment motionless ‘for it cannot have time to move, that is, to occupy at least two successive positions’ simultaneously; ‘at a given moment, therefore, it is at rest at a given point. Motionless in each point of its course, it is motionless during all the time that it is moving’ (Bergson 1998: 308). But Bergson suggests that it is incorrect to suppose that the movement of the arrow consists of a series of still instants; instead there is only a single and indivisible mobility from the point the arrow is fired to the point it hits the target. Bergson points out that Zeno only sees movement in terms of the space traversed, ‘supposing that what is true of the line is true of the movement’ (Bergson 1998: 310). The line of the arrow may be divided infinitely, but Bergson notes that, to see its movement on this basis, the ‘real movement’ must be reconstructed in our thought subsequent to its occurrence. And he points out that ‘the absurdity vanishes as soon as we adopt by

thought the continuity of the real movement, a continuity of which everyone of us is conscious' (Bergson 1998: 310). The movement of the arrow thus takes place not only in space but in time, and more specifically, through duration. Without the continuity of duration there could be no real movement.

Deleuze argues that the cinema is inherently able to provide an image of time as duration, following Bergson's observations.⁴ But although Deleuze adopts Bergson's ideas about time as the foundation of his study of the cinema, the only point where he disagrees with Bergson is in the earlier thinker's assessment of the cinema itself. In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson dismisses the medium's ability to present duration because the image is created by a series of still photographs, which are then run through the projector at speed to create the illusion of continuous movement in time. He writes that 'it is because the film of the cinematograph unrolls, bringing in turn the different photographs of the scene to continue each other, that each actor of the scene recovers his mobility ... Such is the contrivance of the cinematograph' (Bergson 1998: 305-306). For Bergson, the duration that allows movement to take place on the screen is not inherent in the images themselves, but an abstract temporality applied by the mechanical apparatus. Deleuze points out, however, that Bergson's assessment is incorrect because the cinematic image is not the mechanism of filmstrip and projector, but the actual image presented on the screen. Deleuze writes: 'what it gives us is not the photogramme: it is an intermediate image, to which movement is not appended or added; the movement on the contrary belongs to the intermediate image as immediate given' (Deleuze 1986: 2). Thus, according to Deleuze, it is the image on screen that is able to reveal duration. However, Deleuze observes that filmmakers have handled this presentation of time in

⁴ See *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (Deleuze 1986: 1-11). See *Creative Evolution* (Bergson 1998: 305-306) and *Cinema 1* (Deleuze 1986: 1-2).

two different ways, and this difference marks the fundamental historical distinction that he sets up in his cinema books.

Movement, Action and Editing: *The Maltese Falcon*

Deleuze separates the history of cinema into two major periods. The first period, that of classical cinema and the ‘movement-image’, is characterised by its emphasis on movement and action, where time is presented only indirectly. This becomes most pronounced in the Hollywood films of the studio era; these films represent the most active form of the ‘movement-image’, which Deleuze calls the ‘action-image’.⁵ In the cinema of the ‘movement-image’ and, more specifically, the ‘action-image’, characters are placed in sensory-motor situations where they perceive significant details within their surrounding environment and then take physical actions in response. This pattern ranges from individual moments, to whole scenes and to the film overall. As Kovács summarises: ‘the hero becomes a hero by virtue of his/her capacity to act, to respond to a situation, to bridge the gap in order to bring about a new, global situation’ (Kovács 2000: 164). Thus, the classical cinema centres on individuals who are always engaged in action; Deleuze calls this a cinema of the agent.⁶

But it is not only the subjects of this type of cinema that revolve around movement and action; the presentation of the events is similarly organised along these lines. Most importantly, films are structured around sensory-motor situations through their use of analytical editing.⁷ D.N. Rodowick outlines this point, stating that ‘the

⁵ The other two constituents of the larger ‘movement-image’ are the ‘perception-image’ and the ‘affection-image’. See chapters 5 to 7 in *Cinema 1* (Deleuze 1986: 71-122).

⁶ See *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Deleuze 1989: 2-3).

⁷ Deleuze notes that connective editing is central to the movement-image. See his chapter on ‘Montage’ in *Cinema 1* (Deleuze 1986: 29-55).

continuity system of editing established one set of norms for the linkage of shots through rational divisions' (Rodowick 1997: 11). And he further explains the way that editing focuses on movement, drawing parallels between Deleuze's ideas and those of Bazin: 'the most typical example is what Bazin termed analytical montage: actions motivate and completely fill space, spaces are linked in time through chains of action and reaction as well as logical relations of cause and effect' (Rodowick 1997: 68). Therefore, analytical editing functions in several ways to focus on action and reaction. By breaking the scene into individual shots that single out particular details, notably in medium shots or close-ups, the film focuses exclusively on active space, while removing those elements of the *mise en scène* that are inactive. These actions are then linked together by the cutting to create a chain of movement through space and time, where one activity is immediately followed by another. Furthermore, the editing also shapes the unfolding of duration, both within individual scenes and across the whole film, in accordance with the developments of the action; time is defined by the requirements of movements in space.

These features of analytical editing, and its relation to Deleuze's ideas about movement and action in classical cinema, can be considered in more detail by looking again at *The Maltese Falcon*. The film demonstrates an emphasis on movement and action that relates closely to Deleuze's arguments about the 'action-image'.⁸ Firstly, the film is centred throughout on its protagonist, Spade, who is constantly engaged in action; he is the archetypal Deleuzian agent, the hero of classical cinema, defined by his ability to act and, ultimately, to restore order to the world. As Luhr notes in his analysis of *The Maltese Falcon*, 'much of the film's forward narrative drive revolves around Spade's aggressive search for the truth and his processing of and acting upon

⁸ Deleuze names *The Maltese Falcon* as one example of the action-image, as it is represented in the Hollywood detective film. See *Cinema 1* (Deleuze 1986: 164).

each new piece of information he receives' (Luhr 1996: 169). The unfolding of the film is fully determined by the series of sensory-motor situations that comprise Spade's investigation. Specifically, it follows his attempts to identify the criminals and to engineer their arrest by the authorities, thus allowing Spade to absolve himself from the police's accusations that he murdered both his partner and the criminal Floyd Thursby, while also restoring justice and order to the fictional world.

Throughout the film, Spade also shows a strong awareness of his necessity to act, which is demonstrated most clearly in his dialogue at one point in the film when he tells the authorities:

As far as I can see my best chance of clearing myself of the trouble you're trying to make for me is by bringing in the murderers all tied up. And the only chance I have of catching them and tying them up and bringing them in is by staying as far away as possible from you and the police because you'd only gum up the works.

Spade's relentless progression from one action to the next, and from one place to another, is firmly guided by the film's editing. Practically every scene in the film opens with Spade's arrival at a particular location where a significant event takes place and each scene ends as Spade leaves or is about to leave, cutting or dissolving to the next location as he arrives there. There are no idle moments; the film is remarkably efficient in its use of editing between scenes to remove any time that is not necessary to the forward movement of the plot. This is exemplified especially in two scene transitions in the film. The first example comes when Spade first receives a call in his office from the mastermind of the criminal gang, The Fat Man/Kaspar Gutman (Sydney Greenstreet). As Spade sees the widow of his murdered partner out of the office the phone starts to ring. Once she leaves he picks up the phone and acknowledges Gutman excitedly. At this point the camera tracks forward into a close-up of Spade and he tells the man that they can meet right away. Spade then repeats the

hotel room number where they are to meet and at this moment the image quickly dissolves to a shot of the hotel corridor. The lift door immediately opens, Spade walks out and the attendant informs him where the room is located. Later in the film there is another rapid scene transition when Spade awakes in Gutman's deserted hotel room after being drugged. He searches the room for clues to where the criminals may have gone and then, unsuccessfully, sits down on the bed. Here he notices a newspaper on the floor, picks it up and looks at the open page. The film then cuts to a close-up of the paper, which is further accentuated by a quick, forward tracking movement that focuses in on one of the advertised shipping arrivals, marked with a pencil: '5:35 P.M – La Paloma from Hong Kong'. The shot then dissolves to the name painted on the ship itself, engulfed by flames as firemen attempt to put out the fire. There follows a few brief cut-aways to the various men spraying the ship with water before the camera locates Spade as he arrives and asks who was on the ship. In these two examples, the inter-sequence editing therefore maintains a constant forward momentum, which always shows Spade engaged in action; there is no pause or idle moment between one scene and the next.

Analytical editing within the scenes also shapes *The Maltese Falcon's* emphasis on movement and action in space. The cutting focuses on the characters activities and follows their positions within the setting, while shaping the pace and timing of the scene around the developments of the action. This can be observed when Spade returns to his office, where he subsequently meets Joel Cairo. The first three shots follow Spade as he arrives, walks down the corridor, through the reception and then enters his office and sits down at the desk. The film is attuned to this single, fluid movement through these contiguous spaces, following the thread that links them together. The cutting and camera movements make the film's presentation of the

different areas coincide strictly with Spade's passage through them; they are not shown before or after he is present. Then, inside the office, the editing continues to shape space and time around physical action. The scene consists primarily of medium shots and close-ups where the frame is filled by the characters' performances and any empty or inactive space is minimised. The cutting also maintains a constant process of unbroken activity by moving from action to reaction without any moments of pause between them, for example, in the shot/reverse-shot exchange between Spade and Effie over Cairo's name card. The pacing of the scene is therefore determined by a sensory-motor situation that incorporates the actions and reactions between the different characters. This process is crucially maintained by the film's deployment of analytical editing.

These particular moments from *The Maltese Falcon* therefore reflect many of the qualities that Deleuze recognises to be the defining features of classical cinema. The film revolves around an active, agent character in the form of Spade, who restlessly moves from one space to the next and from one action to another. And he knowingly pursues this role, consciously recognising his necessity to act; he is a self-aware agent in the story. The film also structures its own presentation of space and time around the action of its central character by utilising analytical editing. Transitions between scenes lead immediately from one event to the next, coinciding with Spade's departure from one space as it becomes inactive and his arrival in another space, thus activating it. Furthermore, editing within the film's scenes centres on action by focusing exclusively on the active space inhabited by the characters, while excluding any non-active space within the location. The cutting also creates a chain of action and reaction by moving instantaneously from one character to the next, most notably through shot/reverse-shot sequences. As a result of this technique,

the pacing of the scenes is determined by the sensory-motor developments of the action. Because classical cinema focuses so extensively on movement and action, as shown in *The Maltese Falcon*, Deleuze argues that it only provides an indirect image of time. The inherent duration of the film image is largely hidden as time is shaped by movements in space and divided up according to the demands of action. Thus, our experience of time is aligned more closely with its conventional conception, grasped as the measure of movements in space. Moreover, Deleuze observes that the emphasis on movement and action is as definitive of the interwar modernist cinema as it is for the classical American cinema that develops from D.W. Griffith to the Hollywood studio system of the 1930s and 1940s. Thus, Deleuze proposes another way to understand the distinction between interwar modernism and modern European cinema, offering perhaps the most radical explanation of this difference. He argues that in the films of the German Expressionists, the Soviet Montage filmmakers and the French Impressionists, movement is expressed in different ways and through different techniques, but they all essentially rely on connective editing practices that are designed to stress the interconnection and continuity of action or ideas, in which time is presented only indirectly.⁹ But it is this conception of time, and the methods used to maintain it, that Deleuze discovers are challenged by the innovations of filmmakers during and after World War II.

Depth and Time

Deleuze follows Bazin's historical break, identifying the major turning point in film history starting with Welles and coming into full fruition with Italian neorealism.

⁹ See *Cinema 1* (Deleuze 1986: 29-55). The different means of depicting movement through experimental forms of montage can thus be seen as one feature that distinguishes the modernism of these silent films from classical continuity style.

Deleuze argues that these directors mark the shift to cinema's second period, that of modern cinema and the 'time-image'. In this period, cinema becomes no longer characterised by movement and action, but instead by time. Deleuze writes: 'time is no longer the measure of movement but movement is the perspective of time: it constitutes a whole cinema of time, with a new conception and new forms of montage' (Deleuze 1989: 22). One prominent example of the new editing forms that Deleuze points out in modern cinema is found in the very absence of cutting, that is, with the long take. Though Deleuze's notion of the 'time-image' is not exclusively a theory of the long take, as we shall see, the technique does become one major stylistic feature of modern cinema's turn to duration. Where Bazin discovers an increased realism in Welles's deep-focus long take, Deleuze emphasises, rather, the filmmaker's refusal to make time subservient to the action; Welles preserves the concrete duration of the scene and also makes it an essential quality of the shot.¹⁰ Analytical editing makes time subservient to the developments of the action, shaping the unfolding of the film around movements in space. Therefore, time is only shown indirectly. But Welles's long take, by contrast, retains temporal autonomy. As Deleuze writes: 'the special quality of depth of field would be to reverse time's subordination to movement and show time for itself' (Deleuze 1989: 109). By preserving the continuity of the scene, Welles not only shows the development of action in space but, more importantly, its development in time, and thus allows us to experience the course of duration directly.

In his study of *The Magnificent Ambersons*, Perkins similarly acknowledges Welles's emphasis on duration, and he observes that the long take allows time a privileged position in the film. Perkins writes: 'the long take opts for one extreme

¹⁰ See *Cinema 2* (Deleuze 1989: 107-109).

form of the equation between the passage of the spectators' time in the cinema, of the characters' time in the narrative and of the actors' time in performance' (Perkins 1999: 67). This shared *experience* of time between spectator, character and actor is indicative of the duration that Welles captures in the long take; it is an unfolding of time that is simultaneously endured in the shot, despite the physical and historical separations between the spaces of production, fiction and screening. But Welles not only preserves this sense of duration with his use of the long take; he also emphasises it, making the experience of unfolding time a key feature of his aesthetic. Perkins argues that the long take 'can become a means of working into the film and making one of its speaking dimensions, the submission to time that is so marked a feature of the photographic subject' (Perkins 1999: 68). The 'submission to time', as Perkins so aptly puts it, makes the experience of duration pronounced, and it is this pronounced status that, for Deleuze, defines modern cinema.

When Perkins speaks of 'the submission to time that is so marked a feature of the photographic subject', he points to the connection between duration and cinema's photographic ontology, and thus to the common basis that defines the work of Bazin and Deleuze. Cinema's ability to present real, experienced time follows from its ontological basis in reality, which Bazin already suggests in his essay on the photographic image. This is most evident when he states: 'the image of things is likewise the image of their *duration*' (Bazin 1967: 15, my emphasis). For Bazin, duration therefore becomes an inherent quality of reality (just as it does for Bergson), and as such the cinema is innately able to reproduce such real temporality.¹¹ But

¹¹ In his biography of Bazin, Andrew notes that Bergson formed an important influence on the critic's thinking and was a central figure to intellectuals of his generation. See *André Bazin* (Andrew 2013: 12-15). For Bazin, Bergsonian notions of duration are therefore essential to his realist film theory, which will become clearer in my discussions later in this chapter.

although this is a significant possibility of the medium, style plays an important role in shaping the presentation of time, just as it does space. Hence, Welles's emphasis on duration stems fundamentally from his adoption of the long take.

Deleuze's focus on duration in Welles's films brings into greater focus the implicit suggestions about time that Bazin raises in his writings about the filmmaker's use of composition in depth. As Diane Arnaud points out in her essay examining the relationship between Bazin and Deleuze: 'the philosopher's intelligence lies in seeing that Bazin's view of depth of field encompasses the concept of duration' (Arnaud 2011: 88). This becomes evident in Bazin's response to the scene depicting Susan's suicide attempt in *Citizen Kane* and the kitchen scene in *The Magnificent Ambersons* outlined in chapter one. Both scenes reflect the general argument about Welles's composition in depth, which Bazin proposes in a passage that has significant temporal undertones:

The scene charges itself like an electrical condenser as it progresses and must be kept carefully insulated against all parasitic contacts until a sufficient dramatic voltage has been reached, which produces the spark that all the action has been directed toward. (Bazin 1991: 68)

Bazin suggests in this sentence that, by using the deep-focus long take instead of analytical editing, Welles builds the drama out of the moment-by-moment developments captured by the static camera; the dramatic effect is, therefore, reliant on preserving the duration in which the action builds smoothly to the point of completion. In Bazin's discussion of his two example scenes, he draws particular attention to the spatial qualities of the long take and deep focus, but his comments also carry significant temporal associations. It is these ideas that Deleuze identifies within Bazin's analysis and which he draws particular attention to, arguing that in the deep-focus compositions 'we should see not only the conquest of a continuum but the temporal nature of this continuum: it is a continuum of duration which means that the

unbridled depth is of time and no longer of space' (Deleuze 1989: 108). This becomes clearer when examining Bazin's analysis of the scenes more closely.

With Susan's attempted suicide, Bazin identifies the spatial tension created by 'the distinction between the two sound planes' – Susan breathing heavily in the foreground and Kane knocking on the door in the background – 'which are kept at a distance from each other by the deep focus', thus forcing the spectator to distinguish the 'implicit relations' between the elements of the scene (Bazin 1991: 78-80). Although Bazin seems to focus on the spatial dimension of the shot, the temporal implications are apparent. The deep-focus long take establishes not only a tension between the action in the foreground and the background in space, but also in time. We experience directly the duration in which Kane attempts, and eventually manages, to enter the room to discover Susan. The scene's dramatic tension is built on this duration. This is also the basis of Bazin's observations on the *Ambersons* kitchen scene. He notes of this second example that: 'to make us present at [its] evolution right up to the moment when the entire scene explodes beneath this accumulated pressure, it was essential for the borders of the screen to reveal the scene's totality' (Bazin 1991: 73). Here, Bazin again speaks directly about the spatial composition of the scene, but he does so in a way that is linked closely with time. The fixed shot of Fanny and George allows the unfolding of time in which Fanny's anxiety builds steadily until the point where she is overcome by her feelings. The scene's dramatic tension is thus transmitted through its foregrounded duration.

Bazin offers his hypothetical breakdowns of the two scenes in question to demonstrate the realism of Welles's long take. Following Deleuze's re-interpretation of Bazin's observations, the alternative versions that Bazin suggests would also bring a much different treatment of time. The breakdown of these scenes using analytical

editing would mark a return to classical cinema's emphasis on movement and action, where time is represented only indirectly. Bazin points out that the individual shots would be focused on particular sites of dramatic action: close-ups on Fanny when she questions and responds to George, a close-up on Susan as she lies ill in bed, and shots of Kane on the other side of the door trying to get into the room. The camera would thus be focused entirely on active space and the cutting between these shots would establish strong sensory-motor linkages between actions. This would be especially notable with the use of shot/reverse-shot cutting between Susan and Kane, or between Fanny and George, which Bazin suggests as a conventional alternative. Furthermore, the real-time pacing of the scenes would be manipulated, cut or shortened, to be shaped around the exchange of action and reaction, shot and reverse-shot. Thus, the long pauses between Fanny's questions, when her inner unrest subtly emerges in minor behavioural details, becoming more noticeable over time, would likely be sacrificed for close-ups of her momentary responses to George's revelations.

Bazin concludes that, with such a use of analytical editing in these scenes, 'the dramatic continuity would have been the exact opposite of the weighty objectivity Welles imposes' (Bazin 1991: 72). Following the ideas that Deleuze introduces in his cinema books, this opposition between 'dramatic continuity' and 'weighty objectivity' can be seen to reflect a distinction between action and duration. Welles discovers the dramatic potentials made available by preserving duration together with the action. The deep-focus long take still maintains an emphasis on action in Welles's hands; he is keen to focus on the dramatic developments that take place in the scene. However, these actions are presented without sacrificing the duration in which they occur, thus, as Deleuze puts it: 'reaching the event in the course of happening' (Deleuze 1986: 206). Moreover, Welles utilises this unfolding of duration in the shot to enhance the

dramatic effect of the action. Mark Le Fanu summarises this notion well when he writes that the long take ‘draws us into the scene in question with a particular dramatic force and intimacy. Delivering the audience over, as it does, to real time, it delivers us over to the suspense and awkwardness that present-tense drama entails’ (Le Fanu 2005: 3). By doing so, Welles also refuses to make time subservient to movement. Nonetheless, for Deleuze, it is in the marginalisation and rejection of action altogether that modern cinema is able to develop its temporal aesthetic most profoundly.

Neorealism and the Crisis of Action: *Umberto D*

Welles marks the beginnings of a decisive turning point in film history for Deleuze. But, like Bazin, he observes the full realisation of modern cinema after World War II, beginning with Italian neorealism. As Beasley-Murray writes: ‘for both neorealism functions as the hinge or turning point structuring and revealing the process of this film history ... Bazin’s theory of neorealism *is* the break between Deleuze’s two volumes’ (Beasley-Murray 1997: 38). Deleuze opens his discussion of the ‘time-image’ in *Cinema 2* by summarising Bazin’s interpretation of neorealism and its discovery of a new cinematic approach. Deleuze writes:

According to him, it was a matter of a new form of reality, said to be dispersive, elliptical, errant or wavering, working in blocs, with deliberately weak connections and floating events ... neo-realism aimed at an always ambiguous, to be deciphered, real; this is why the sequence shot tended to replace the montage of representations. (Deleuze 1989:1)

These ideas form the basis of Deleuze’s conception of neorealism. However, where Bazin emphasises an aesthetic of realism, Deleuze recognises a profound crisis of the old ‘action-image’, which leads to the appearance of new situations where time becomes dominant. In the final chapter of *Cinema 1*, Deleuze charts the breakdown of

the ‘action-image’ with the films of Rossellini, De Sica and the other neorealist filmmakers in the 1940s.¹²

Two socio-historical factors can be seen to account for such a breakdown of the previous emphasis on movement and action with neorealism. The first, most immediate factor determining the crisis was the upheaval and devastation brought about by the war. Deleuze writes: ‘at the end of the war, Rossellini discovered a dispersive and lacunary reality – already in *Rome, Open City*, but above all in *Paisà* – a series of fragmentary, chopped up encounters, which call into question ... the action-image’ (Deleuze 1986: 212). The characters were thus thrown into situations that no longer conformed to the same stability and certainty of space and movement as before, and neorealism aimed to capture this chaotic and indefinite climate. The second factor of this historical break relates to the political context of neorealism, and its suspicion of cinematic forms previously employed for fascist propaganda. Deleuze notes that the great problem of the ‘movement-image’ was its capacity to be exploited for ideological purposes; it had ‘degenerated into state propaganda and manipulation, into a kind of fascism which brought together Hitler and Hollywood’ (Deleuze 1989: 164). The American cinema had developed an idealist world-view, where the hero becomes triumphant through positive action, but this same form was equally suited to the promotion of radical and repressive ideological movements. As Richard Rushton points out, ‘despite the grandeur and brilliance of the movement-image ... it nevertheless produced modes of thought that could be utilized by fascism, and a filmmaker like Leni Riefenstahl ... was every bit as capable of producing brilliant movement-images’ (Rushton 2012: 101). Thus, Deleuze observes that for the neorealists, ‘cinema had to begin again from zero, questioning afresh all the accepted

¹² See *Cinema 1* (Deleuze 1986: 205-213).

facts of the American tradition' (Deleuze 1986: 211). This involved the essential rejection of the old cinema of action, which had been so exploited by the recent dictatorial regimes.

This crisis, brought about first in Rossellini's films, results from a breakdown of the sensory-motor situations and the structures that cinema had built around them.¹³ As action is put into crisis, so too are the methods of analytical editing that were developed to support it, and Deleuze observes a number of aesthetic characteristics in neorealism that reflect this collapse of the 'action-image' and its sensory-motor situations. Firstly, the events no longer become part of a global, synthetic situation, but are instead dispersive: 'the characters are multiple, with weak interferences and become principle or revert to being secondary' (Deleuze 1986: 207). The films do not revolve exclusively around the movements of an individual, or single group of protagonists; diversions and interruptions interfere with the development of action and insignificant events become more prominent. Secondly, Deleuze notes that: 'the line or the fibre of the universe which prolonged events into one another, or brought about the connection of portions of space, has broken ... Linkages, connections, or liasons are deliberately weak. Chance becomes the sole guiding thread' (Deleuze 1986: 207). Editing does not function to connect up spaces based on chains of action that move across the shots in a distinct teleological trajectory; the presentation of space is no longer dependent on the action that takes place within it or the connection with active spaces that precede and follow. Furthermore, the purposeful undertaking of the hero is replaced by an aimless 'modern voyage', which is 'detached from the active and affective structure which supported it, directed it, gave it even vague directions'

¹³ Deleuze writes: 'the first things to be compromised everywhere are the linkages of situation-action, action-reaction, excitation-response, in short the sensory-motor links which produced the action-image' (Deleuze 1986: 206).

(Deleuze 1986: 208). The haphazard travels of the characters take them through indeterminate, empty ‘any-space-whatever’: ruined cities, abandoned industrial wastelands, deserted volcanic islands and so on, where movement loses its effective determination over the temporal unfolding of the events.¹⁴

Deleuze’s discussion about the crisis of action in neorealism is somewhat limited because he does not align these aesthetic characteristics with any particular stylistic techniques (though in his comments about Bazin and neorealism he does mention the replacement of editing with the sequence shot). But, to elaborate further on Deleuze’s observations and address these shortcomings, we can see that these characteristics are reflected particularly in the long take. Moreover, they are reflected in the very qualities of the long take that Bazin identifies in relation to his theory of realism. Firstly, the technique encourages a dispersive situation because it refuses to breakdown and to analyse the scene according to its dramatic logic, focusing exclusively on significant details of action or elements of the *mise en scène*. Instead, the long take includes a multiplicity of activities and details that may divert or distract from the central course of action, and it allows the perceptual freedom to explore all the features of the scene equally. This emphasis on the wholeness of the events also results in a greater degree of ambiguity around any developing action, thus further weakening its dominance of the image. Secondly, the long take creates a deliberate weakening of the linkages between actions by avoiding analytical editing’s dramatic connections and, instead, it preserves the physical relations between all the elements within a single space. Chains of action are, therefore, not formed by cutting between significant details, and the spectator is left to deduce any such links from the totality

¹⁴ Deleuze also identifies two further characteristics that he argues contribute to the crisis of the ‘action-image’. These are a ‘consciousness of clichés’ and the ‘condemnation of the plot’. See *Cinema I* (Deleuze 1986: 208-210). I leave these last two characteristics aside, however, because they seem to relate more closely to subject matter than to film style.

of the space presented in the shot. Thirdly, the long take emphasises the aimless, undirected movements of the characters in ‘any-space-whatever’ by placing them firmly within their surrounding environments. The technique also accentuates the indeterminate nature of space by promoting a greater sense of ambiguity, avoiding the clarity offered by close-ups and cutting.

These characteristics, reflecting the crisis of action brought about in the long take, can be observed particularly in the Florence episode of *Paisà*. The dispersive nature of the situation, which results largely from the spatial wholeness preserved in the long take, is demonstrated in the film’s introduction of Harriet at the hospital and its depiction of her subsequent journey. Throughout the episode, she becomes only one of many characters and her movements form part of the multiplicity of activities taking place in and around the city. The episode also demonstrates a deliberate weakening of the linkages between actions as Harriet and Massimo attempt to reach their relatives in the war-torn city. Rossellini not only includes a number of encounters that distract from the journey, such as the British soldiers on the hill or the man on the roof terrace, but also allows these encounters to dominate the screen for extended periods by filming them in long takes. Here, the teleological advancement from one active space to another, representing the movement of the characters towards their goal, is halted while the camera lingers on divergent events that add little to the progress of their mission. Rossellini does not employ analytical editing to remove these insignificant diversions, or to shape the film’s presentation of space around the movement and action of the protagonists. Furthermore, throughout the episode, Rossellini uses the long take to place the characters firmly within the surrounding environment and to show their meandering journey through the devastated urban space. Although Harriet and Massimo have clear goals, their route

through the city becomes complicated and uncertain, as they negotiate safe passages over roofs, through tunnels and down back streets. The camera tracks the characters in lengthy long shots, which emphasise the indeterminate and ambiguous nature of this ‘any-space-whatever’, where directions are unclear and danger could appear at any moment.



Fig. 3.1 *Paisà* (1946)

In the opening chapter of *Cinema 2*, Deleuze tracks the development from the crisis of the ‘action-image’ and its sensory-motor situations to the new situations that define the ‘time-image’ in neorealism. He observes that, with the dispersive events, the weakening of connections and the emphasis on aimless voyages through ‘any-space-whatever’, the old sensory-motor situations become replaced with purely optical and sound situations, characterised especially by idle periods that depict everyday banality and limit-situations where marginal events outlast their necessary

justification according to the conventions of dramatic action.¹⁵ Here, the characters no longer take affirmative moves to achieve set goals; instead, for the most part, they merely observe the world around them. Deleuze states that ‘this is a cinema of the seer and no longer of the agent’ (Deleuze 1989: 2). Though perception was equally dominant in the ‘movement-image’ it was tied into action. But in neorealism, the characters’ observations do not form part of a sensory-motor situation leading to action and reaction, as they were with the heroes of classical cinema. Instead, they linger on details whose precise meaning remains unclear. In these idle periods and limit-situations, movement and action cease to govern the unfolding of the events and time takes precedence in the film.

In his discussion of the new situations that characterise neorealism, Deleuze once more refrains from indicating any particular stylistic techniques that filmmakers adopted to achieve this new temporal aesthetic. This, again, demonstrates a limitation of his otherwise insightful observations. But, by elaborating on Deleuze’s ideas in relation to focus of this thesis, it becomes clear that one of the major ways that such idle periods and limit-situations come to dominate these films stylistically is through the long take. The neorealist directors that Deleuze refers to choose not to structure their films around movement and action by frequently allowing the camera to remain fixed on events for extended periods where little or nothing takes place. These non-events become prevalent rather than being cut out through the editing. By holding on such periods of inaction the long take is thus able to stretch them to their limits, and the duration that is already preserved in the shot becomes increasingly pressing. To rephrase this point, it is clear that Deleuze’s arguments about the idle periods and limit-situations of the ‘time-image’ help to provide a compelling account of the long

¹⁵ See *Cinema 2* (Deleuze 1989: 2-5).

take in modern European cinema by identifying one of its most important, defining characteristics. Furthermore, even when the lengths of the takes in these neorealist films are modest, when compared, for example, with Welles's sequence shots, the temporal effect remains prominent. The duration of the shots becomes conspicuous as the presentation of events exceeds their necessity to communicate any dramatic developments.¹⁶ Thus, the experience of a shot's length often becomes pointed even if the shot is not of an excessive measurable length. For this reason, statistical analysis is shown to be very limited in its account of the temporality of the long take because it is unable to adequately describe the quality of duration in the shot, the experience of time rather than its measurement.

Deleuze takes the famous scene of the maid in the kitchen from De Sica's *Umberto D* (1952) as his first example of the purely optical and sound situations that define neorealism. The sequence takes place between a phone call that the film's elderly protagonist Umberto (Carlo Battisti) makes to the hospital and the arrival of the ambulance that takes him away for treatment. The telephone is located in the hallway, where the young maid Maria (Maria Pia Casilio) sleeps on a makeshift bed. She is woken up by Umberto's call and when he returns to his room to wait for the medics the film turns its attention to her morning routine. Before going into the kitchen, she takes a moment to stir; she notices a cat walking across the skylight above her and then she slowly rises, yawning and rubbing her eyes. Maria puts on her slippers and dressing gown and makes her way unhurriedly down the hallway to the kitchen. She enters the room and approaches the stove, where she attempts to light the

¹⁶ Here, the long take in neorealism differs from that in Welles's films. In the latter, the duration of the shot coincides with the development of the drama, so that Welles maintains both a focus on action and on duration simultaneously. In neorealism, however, the duration of the takes is emphasised at the expense of action; it is by refusing to focus on action that time becomes dominant in the shot.

hob with a match, failing on the first attempt but succeeding the second time round, when she turns the gas tap. Maria then goes over to the window where she notices another cat climbing the roof of an adjacent building. She remains here for a moment, watching the largely empty space outside, before returning to her chores. She goes back to the other side of the kitchen where she picks up a coffee pot, takes it over to the tap and fills it with water. Noticing insects on the wall, she splashes them away



Fig. 3.2 *Umberto D* (1952)

with the hose and then sips some water. Maria takes the coffee pot to the stove, tidying away some papers from the table on her way. When she places the pot on the stove her eyes are drawn to her pregnant belly and she pauses for a moment. Maria then moves to the table where she grinds the coffee, as faint tears run gently down her cheeks. While she remains seated, she stretches out her foot to close the door, at

which point Maria is interrupted by the doorbell and the arrival of the ambulance to collect Umberto.

Deleuze's discussion of this scene is inspired by Bazin's response to the film around the time of its original release.¹⁷ Bazin emphasises the realism of the scene, which he links explicitly to its treatment of time. Whereas the temporal implications are implicit in Bazin's discussion of Welles's sequence shots, his comments on *Umberto D* directly address the significance of time. Here, the relations between Bazin's thought and that of Deleuze is demonstrated most clearly. Bazin states that, in De Sica's film, 'one catches a glimpse, on a number of occasions, of what a truly realist cinema of time could be, a cinema of "duration"' (Bazin 1971: 76). Bazin stresses that the film's depiction of time in the kitchen scene is attuned to the experience of the character; the camera follows Maria, moment-by-moment, as she goes about her daily routines. He writes: 'it is a matter of making "life time" – the simple continuing to be of a person to whom nothing in particular happens – take on the quality of a spectacle, of a drama' (Bazin 1971: 76). In particular, he is struck by the way that the film refuses to employ ellipsis to shape the scene's duration according to the development of dramatic action. Bazin aligns temporal ellipsis with analytical editing and its abstraction of the events, noting that 'it presupposes analysis and choice; it organizes the facts in accord with the general dramatic direction to which it forces them to submit' (Bazin 1971: 81). De Sica, however, avoids such ellipsis by showing all the small events that make up the whole duration of the scene.¹⁸ The film's realism, for Bazin, thus derives from its presentation of 'lived', experienced duration, which contrasts with the dramatic ellipsis of time employed

¹⁷ See Bazin's two articles, 'De Sica: Metteur en Scène' (originally published in 1951) and 'Umberto D: A Great Work' (originally published in 1952), both collected in *What is Cinema? Volume 2* (Bazin 1971: 76-82).

¹⁸ See 'Umberto D: A Great Work' (Bazin 1971: 81-82).

through analytical editing. The subsequent moments of relative inaction become a notable feature of this turn to real time in the scene.

Deleuze expands on Bazin's observations to show not only how the scene presents the unfolding of duration, undetermined by the developments of action, but also how it becomes the dominant feature of the image, as action is reduced to a minimum. He draws attention to the succession of minor details and events that comprise Maria's morning routine in the kitchen, 'making a series of mechanical, weary gestures' as she tidies things up and prepares the coffee (Deleuze 1989: 1). And he stresses that the scene revolves around her mere observations of various details within her environment, which takes the place of meaningful action. These observations do not lead into action, even when Maria is suddenly reminded of her unplanned pregnancy. Deleuze writes:

This is how, in an ordinary or everyday situation, in the course of a series of gestures, which are insignificant but all the more obedient to simple sensory-motor schemata, what has suddenly been brought about is a *pure optical situation* to which the little maid has no response or reaction. (Deleuze 1989: 2)

Maria's pregnancy is indicated when she catches sight of her belly, after putting the coffee pot on the hob. The camera tracks gently forward towards her as she looks up and out of frame, while she runs her hand across her body. Then, we see her tears as she grinds the coffee. This revelation provides a strong motivation for dramatic action in the scene. However, Deleuze points out that this becomes only one detail among the many others she encounters in her morning routine. The film affords the moment the same weight of emphasis as the cats that Maria notices climbing around outside the building. And like these moments, she fails to take an affirmative physical response to what she sees; she does not break down in sadness about her unplanned child. Instead, as Andrew Klevan suggests, we observe 'something less on the verge

of crisis, something much more indeterminate' (Klevan 2000: 47). Although the camera moves forward for a close-up of her reaction, Maria's response is strikingly muted. And her tears in the following shot do not take precedence over the grinding of the coffee beans. There is a blurring between the significant and the insignificant in the scene, where each of the micro-actions appears equally to the maid's vision, and to the camera's.

Steven Marchant takes Deleuze's comments as the starting point for his discussion of the kitchen scene in *Umberto D*, arguing that the film's organisation around the maid's look, and her series of optical encounters, reveals a world that is 'concrete and mysterious': 'the objects she sees are granted no exchangeable psychological value; her visions – the things revealed to her – are valued for themselves not for what they reflect of her character or for how they move the narrative on' (Marchant 2009: 150). Klevan, on the other hand, argues in his analysis that the scene revolves around the psychological complexities of the character: 'her engagement with the kitchen is integral to expressing her indeterminate and undemonstrative feelings in these early stages of understanding her pregnancy' (Klevan 2000: 48). But he emphasises that Maria's state of mind is 'not revealed through confessional dialogue, confrontational encounters or expressionistic transformation of her environment, but rather through routine morning activity ... The interest lies in the apparently innocuous use of objects, a fact partly illustrated by the lack of close-ups' (Klevan 2000: 48-49). Marchant's emphasis on the preservation of mystery and Klevan's suggestion about muted psychological expression, conveyed through everyday routine, provide two differing interpretations of the scene. However, they both take their lead from Deleuze's observations, and for each writer the significance of the scene lies in its depiction of Maria's inactive observations of

her surrounding details. It is this reduction of action and emphasis on seeing that means time is foregrounded in the scene.

These critics all outline the scene's temporal emphasis and its rejection of dramatic action very clearly, yet none discuss the way that the film handles time through the shots. Therefore, I shall now turn more specifically to De Sica's use of the long take in the scene to show how this becomes a central stylistic feature of its temporal aesthetic. Although there are no extensive long takes in the scene, there is a tendency for most shots to follow the minor actions that Maria performs in their entirety.¹⁹ Thus, through the use of long takes, De Sica avoids the ellipses of time that Bazin points out, and is able, instead, to preserve the unfolding duration experienced by the protagonist. For example, De Sica shows Maria's movement down the corridor from her bed to the kitchen in a single shot, thus capturing the full duration it takes for her to get between these two locations. Inside the kitchen, the camera follows Maria as she enters and approaches the stove, where she is framed in a fixed medium shot, while she tries to light the hob. The shot does not cut to the next one until she completes the task, then looks up to the window and starts to move away from the stove. Only once she has left this area of the kitchen, the film cuts to her new position by the window. Furthermore, De Sica does not cut into Maria's activity to focus on any particular details, or to quicken the pacing of the action. Klevan notes, for instance, that the scratches on the wall, where she lights the matches, are not highlighted through the use of editing: 'no close-up grants the markings privilege, and they have a low degree of prominence in the shot' (Klevan 2000: 47). Thus, time in the scene is not shaped around the completion of tasks (striking the match, lighting

¹⁹ The exceptions to this approach are demonstrated in the few instances of cross-cutting: when Maria notices the cats, first on the skylight above her bed and then outside the kitchen window, and then when she stretches out her foot to close the door. Otherwise, the scene relies predominantly on long takes.

the hob, collecting the coffee and so on), with cuts between actions. Rather, to quote Bazin, the shots present a 'succession of concrete instances of life, no one of which can be said to be more important than another' (Bazin 1971: 81).

De Sica's use of long takes not only preserves duration by refusing to shape time around action, but also accentuates the dominance of time in the shot. By remaining fixed on the maid as she carries out her minor tasks, the absence of dramatic action becomes explicit; the limited activity is stretched to its limits and time becomes pressing. This is demonstrated, for instance, in the shot where the camera follows Maria's movements around the room. She moves to the cupboard to collect the coffee pot, then over to the tap by the far wall, where she fills it up. Maria then approaches the table in the centre of the room, collects some papers and puts them away in a draw beside another wall. She then walks back to the cooker and places the pot on the hob. Klevan points out that the significance of the scene 'is disclosed by the non-energetic arrangement of body, environment and object' (Klevan 2000: 49). But what he does not mention is that the relations between these elements are primarily maintained through the long take, as demonstrated in the shot just described. Here, as elsewhere in the scene, these 'non-energetic arrangements' of the character, her surroundings, and the other items within these surroundings are revealed through the shot's continuity of space and time. By drawing attention to Maria's inactive engagement with her environment through the long take, duration in the scene becomes most apparent.

Limit-Situations and the Long Take After Neorealism: *Jeanne Dielman*

Writing from the perspective of the 1980s, Deleuze was able to see that the innovations in cinematic temporality brought about by neorealism in the immediate

post-war years were further developed in European cinema in the following decades. In particular, Deleuze notes that neorealism was succeeded by Antonioni, the French New Wave and the New German Cinema, and he charts the history of the crisis of the ‘action-image’ along these lines, noting that ‘the timing is something like: around 1948, Italy; about 1958 France; about 1968, Germany’ (Deleuze 1986: 211). Thus, Deleuze recognises an historical tradition of modern cinema in Europe that extends beyond the initial period of neorealism. He sees Antonioni, in particular, to extend the features of neorealism, noting that his films present ‘an astonishing development of the idle periods of everyday banality’ and ‘a treatment of limit-situations which pushes them to the point of dehumanized landscapes, of empty spaces that might be seen as having absorbed characters and actions’ (Deleuze 1989: 5). Deleuze’s study is centered on Western Europe, but the developments that he identifies should also be expanded to the new waves of Eastern Europe, in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Russia. Here, as in the West, filmmakers embarked on new aesthetic approaches that challenged conventional cinematic presentations of time, equally inspired by the discoveries of the Italian neorealist filmmakers.²⁰ Thus, modern cinema became a pan-European phenomenon in the 1960s and 1970s. During this period, the crisis of action and the proliferation of idle periods and limit-situations becomes much more extensive than before. As a result, duration becomes an increasingly dominant feature of these films. This also coincides with a more radical adoption of the long take by many filmmakers, who push the technique to much further extremes than their neorealist predecessors. Therefore, in these films, the temporal aesthetic that Deleuze identifies and which is elaborated stylistically through the long take is undeniable.

²⁰ Kovács’s study in *Screening Modernism* goes the furthest among the existing literature on the topic to emphasise the equal spread of modern cinema in both West and East Europe. In this thesis, I follow Kovács’s geographical outlook, taking Andrei Tarkovsky and Miklós Jancsó as two of my major case studies. See Chapter 4 and Chapter 6.

The increasing significance of time within the long-take tradition of modern European cinema can be observed by looking more closely at a particular film. Chantal Akerman's 1975 work *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* is a notable example that expands the temporal dimensions of the long take emerging in the *Umberto D* kitchen scene. Several scenes in Akerman's film depict a comparable morning routine focusing on a solitary female character in and around a kitchen. One such example starts on the morning of the second day. The film's protagonist Jeanne (Delphine Seyrig) awakes, switches on the light, puts on her dressing gown and opens the window. She washes her hands in the bathroom sink and then goes into the living room where she lights the heater. Jeanne collects some clothes from the bedroom wardrobe and places them on the end of her son's foldaway bed in the living room. She then collects his shoes on her way out. In the kitchen, Jeanne fills a pot with water, places it on the cooker hob and lights it. She then goes into a cupboard under the sink, removes some newspaper and polish, takes these items over to the table and starts to polish the shoes. Once they are fully polished, Jeanne puts the newspaper and polish back under the sink and takes the shoes back to the living room. She then returns to the kitchen where she grinds some coffee, puts it in the pot and collects a number of items from the cupboard to set the table for breakfast. Jeanne finally drinks a cup of coffee and then wakes her son.

Like the kitchen scene in *Umberto D*, Akerman's film revolves around the mundane, routine activities that Jeanne carries out mechanically in her domestic environment. These actions are not shaped by any logical dramatic development, but amount instead to a succession of laborious everyday tasks, where her experience of time (and, simultaneously, ours) is intensely foregrounded. Akerman takes this aesthetic further than De Sica, however, both in the sheer amount of routine activities

that make up the scene (and the entire film) and the disengaged manner in which Jeanne performs them. The film shows Jeanne's experience as a relentless succession of highly repetitive domestic tasks to which she has no escape. One task leads to another as Jeanne goes from one space to another. This marks a significant expansion of the earlier film's attention to limit-situations.



Fig. 3.3 *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975)

But it is the nature of Jeanne's performance that marks a major point of departure in *Jeanne Dielman* from its neorealist precursor. In *Umberto D*, the maid's routine supports her act of looking, her discovery of various details in the world that surrounds her. Marchant points out that 'the scene presents itself as so many revelations; a world revealed in its details ... the revelation of the new and curious suggests a redemptive possibility' (Marchant 2009: 150). And there is also a sense of tranquil harmony between Maria and her environment, even though her experience of duration is foregrounded. Klevan notes, for example, that: 'as she moves around the kitchen, her delicate pace suggests a certain relief, almost a modest relishing of a space which allows some serene privacy' (Klevan 2000: 47). In *Jeanne Dielman*, by

contrast, there are no revelations. Throughout the scene, and the film overall, Jeanne remains in a state of (dis)engagement with her physical tasks and does not see anything that provides redemption from the mundane nature of her everyday existence. She is not one of Deleuze's neorealist seers, but neither does she mark a return to the classical agent. Although Jeanne is constantly engaged in action, her tasks do not amount to sensory-motor situations with any clear sense of teleological development. Furthermore, unlike Maria in *Umberto D*, Jeanne's activities do not allow any sense of relief or tranquility; instead they are rigorously repetitive and often physically demanding. Ivone Margulies points out in her analysis of the film that: 'typical of neorealist attention to the marginal discourse is a certain idealism. In *Jeanne Dielman*, Akerman disables romantic connotations by giving to the mundane its proper, and heavy, weight' (Margulies 1996: 23). This becomes particularly apparent, for example, when Jeanne polishes her son's shoes. She has to repeat the activity several times, one shoe then the other, applying the polish, then buffing with a brush, then finishing with a cloth. This contrasts starkly with Maria's gentle engagement with the objects in her space as she prepares the coffee. Jeanne's task is much more repetitive, physically exhausting and incessant.

The emphasis on repetition and the lack of any revelation in *Jeanne Dielman* makes the depiction of time more insistent in the film, and this is also closely connected with Akerman's use of the extensive long take.²¹ Each location within the apartment – kitchen, bedroom, lounge, bathroom – is filmed in a single, fixed shot where Jeanne's repetitive activities are shown in their full duration. Through her use

²¹ I leave aside the relationship between Akerman's extensive long-take style and her feminist political concerns, which has become a central feature of critical interest in the film. For discussions of this issue see *Nothing Happens: Chantal Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday* (Margulies 1996: 4-7) and Marion Schmid's *Chantal Akerman* (Schmid 2010: 32-50). Here, however, I intend only to outline the more immediate stylistic qualities of the technique as it is used in this film, demonstrating the continued concern with duration in long-take filmmaking after neorealism.

the long take, Akerman therefore takes to an extreme the refusal of conventional ellipses, which Bazin identifies in relation to De Sica's film. In Akerman's film there is not only an equivalence between the character's experience of time and the film's presentation, which makes duration a significant feature of the shot; this duration becomes self-consciously acute. For Bazin, the emphasis on duration in the *Umberto D* kitchen scene is essential to its realism. The film respects Maria's real, lived time, rather than manipulating the scene's unfolding, according to the developments of dramatic action. In *Jeanne Dielman*, Akerman still respects Jeanne's lived time, but this duration is taken to the point of excess. The minimalist action, and its repetitive nature, lasts for such a long period on screen, uninterrupted, that it becomes formally abstract. In other words, our attention is drawn not only to the events depicted within the frame, but also to the presence of the shot itself, as a shot of extraordinary duration. Margulies coins the term 'hyperrealism' to describe Akerman's film, which offers a very appropriate conception of the filmmaker's long-take style, and especially its treatment of time.²² Akerman stretches the limits of duration within her long takes and thus creates a heightened, even stylised, version of the real time championed by Bazin. And this becomes another example of the dialectic between realism and formalism in the long take after neorealism. *Jeanne Dielman*'s 'excessive' development of its neorealist predecessor's emphasis on time reflects the general trend of long-take filmmaking in Europe after the 1950s. Filmmakers like Akerman and Andrei Tarkovsky (as we shall see in the following chapter of this thesis) take the proliferation of idle periods and limit-situations that Deleuze identifies in neorealism to further extremes, and they do so predominantly through their radical extension of the long take.

²² See *Nothing Happens* (Margulies 1996: 65-73).

Deleuze's ideas about the 'time-image' and cinematic duration have proved to be very influential on the work of subsequent writers. In more contemporary film scholarship, the subject of cinematic temporality that Deleuze forcefully introduces in his cinema books has been further explored in relation to modern European cinema and beyond. These subsequent critical studies help to uncover some notable aesthetic implications relating to the durational qualities of the long take. In *Disclosure of the Everyday: Undramatic Achievement in Narrative Film* (2000), Klevan takes Deleuze's ideas about the 'time-image' as one conception of filmmakers' attempts to represent the everyday in cinema. But while Klevan largely agrees with Deleuze's assessment of the filmmakers in question, he disagrees with his suggestion that they mark a turn to the everyday. Klevan notes that, starting with Rossellini's *Paisà*: 'many directors have become obsessed with limit situations ... and much of their work is fascinated with what I might call the *melodrama of time*' (Klevan 2000: 46). Klevan identifies Antonioni, Akerman and Tarkovsky as particular examples of the 'melodrama of time', suggesting that 'the films by the directors mentioned are not characterised by a "motor situation" of one event leading to another, but of one big event, where a single situation is pushed to the limits', and subsequently, where 'time appears to be pressing in the shot, stretched and tense' (Klevan 2000: 46). For Klevan, these films are concerned with the intensified visual drama resulting from the direct, and hyperbolic, engagement with time in the film. Such an approach, while rejecting the melodramatic action typified by classical Hollywood, is still removed from the ordinariness of the everyday, according to Klevan. He writes: 'the everyday is not characterised by this melodrama of time borne from such limit situations; time does not have the same dramatic punch, or such palpability. The everyday can be conceptualised as the concentration on *different times*' (Klevan 2000: 46). Although

Klevan does not explicitly link his ideas about the ‘melodrama of time’ with the long take, this is strongly suggested by the particular filmmakers that he cites and his emphasis on time within the shot. Furthermore, to extrapolate Klevan’s comments, we can see that it is by using the long take that the filmmakers in question are able to take ordinary, everyday situations and make them appear extraordinary by stretching them to their limits.

This point is demonstrated explicitly in the *Jeanne Dielman* kitchen scene. Akerman’s use of the long take, in which the camera remains fixed on Jeanne as she performs her everyday domestic tasks, emphasises the prolonged, repetitive nature of the film’s minor actions. As such, they are expanded beyond the point of casual ordinariness to become much more intense, visually dramatic events. For example, by holding on Jeanne for the full duration of the shoe polishing, the action is stretched to its limits and time becomes pressing in the shot. A brief shot would be enough to convey the task in the banal terms by which it is ordinarily considered, but Akerman is intent on uncovering, and emphasising, the dramatic interest of this undramatic event. Over the course of time, the action becomes more extraordinary in its sheer, sustained duration. This is further reflected in the rigorous composition of space and objects in the scene, with the camera remaining frontal and static to frame the geometric lines and blocks created by the décor and furniture. The arrangement of space therefore also avoids any sense of casualness in the image. The visual patterning of the shot echoes the rigid, stringent order of Jeanne’s life and therefore complements the tension conveyed primarily through the time of the long take.

Kovács is another important critic to elaborate on the temporal qualities of the long take in modern European cinema. In *Screening Modernism*, he outlines what he argues are the basic tenets of modern film form, and his ideas are greatly influenced

by Deleuze's ideas about time. Kovács argues that: 'the main tendency in modern cinema's approach to reality is to represent it by *surface images* that do not refer to an underlying continuous process of development, which is commonly manifested in classical narrative' (Kovács 2007: 121). This results in a notably fragmented and static formal aesthetic. But Kovács insists that this fragmentation and stasis does not necessarily mean a lack of visual continuity or the absence of physical movement. Rather, the action 'has no direction' and 'the continuous flow of images is not the manifestation of a teleological process' that links the events into a chain of action (Kovács 2007: 121). Kovács's ideas are openly indebted to Deleuze's observations on the crisis of action and the breakdown of sensory-motor situations, and he concludes that: 'the modern film image is understood more as a stand-alone (continuous or noncontinuous) fragment than as an organic element of a synthesizing organic process' (Kovács 2007: 121). Kovács builds on Deleuze, however, to show that this break in the link between events reflects a more significant disconnection between the surface presentation of the action and its underlying essence.²³ It is this separation that Kovács believes is the defining formal feature of modern European cinema.

Kovács observes that this disconnect between the surface of events and their underlying essence can be expressed in two ways. Some filmmakers deploy a radically discontinuous aesthetic, where editing works not to connect up spaces in an organic chain of action, but to disconnect these spaces, to emphasise their separation.²⁴ But alternatively, filmmakers can also emphasise this separation between surface and essence through a radically continuous form. Kovács notes that:

Radical continuity is the result of the same conception about the fragmented nature of the world as articulated by its counterpart, only

²³ See *Screening Modernism* (Kovács 2007: 123-124).

²⁴ Here Kovács essentially echoes what Deleuze calls 'irrational cuts' and 'false continuity', which comprise one form of the 'time-image'. See *Cinema 2* (Deleuze 1989: xi).

this fragmentation is expressed by means of a contiguous superficial texture where the elements have accidental, arbitrary connections. (Kovács 2007: 127)

One major form of ‘radical continuity’, deriving from neorealism and epitomised in the work of filmmakers such as Antonioni, Tarkovsky and Akerman, is characterised by extensive long takes, slow plot development and an emphasis on scenes where ‘nothing happens’. Here, duration becomes the dominant feature of the shots.²⁵ Kovács states that, ‘time has considerable autonomy as slowness and length of takes separate time experience of the film from the events and actions developing in the plot ... As Deleuze suggests, it is like watching time in its pure form’ (Kovács 2007: 128-129). The consequence of the temporal autonomy achieved by this ‘radical continuity’ in the long take is to create a disconnect between the surface of the events as they appear in the film and the underlying situation they are supposed to represent; it ‘constructs a mental structure of experiencing time that is not subjected to the logic of the unfolding plot’ (Kovács 2007: 129).

The disconnect between the surface of events and their underlying essence, which Kovács argues is a result of ‘radical continuity’ in the long take, is reflected in both the examples from *Umberto D* and *Jeanne Dielman* previously cited. In the earlier film, the maid’s movements around the kitchen, her various domestic tasks and her observations of particular details in her surroundings are removed from any suggestion of underlying development or significance. The camera follows Maria throughout the duration of her activities, capturing her experience of time and

²⁵ Kovács observes that another form of ‘radical continuity’ derives from the literary nouveau roman movement and ‘is represented by the continuous way of representing a flow of mental associations through different layers of time and domains of consciousness’ (Kovács 2007: 128). This form of ‘radical continuity’ does rely on editing, which is connective rather than discontinuous (as in ‘radical discontinuity’), but the connections are purely mental rather than physical. Kovács’s main example of this trend is Alain Resnais, especially in *Hiroshima, mon amour* (*Hiroshima, My Love*, 1959) and *L’année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year at Marienbad*, 1961). See *Screening Modernism* (Kovács 2007: 128-131).

allowing us to share this period of her existence. But the experience of time depicted in the scene does not relate to any significant underlying meaning; the film records the surface of Maria's actions with a keen attention, but without attempting to uncover what lies behind them. In particular, we are given no sense of Maria's thoughts about her situation. The camera reveals her observations and her physical movements but her psychological responses remain largely mysterious and indeterminate. The scene does not organise itself around her mental reactions to the world.²⁶ For Kovács, such an 'absence of psychological depth' is an especially recognisable form of the disconnect between surface and essence in modern cinema.²⁷ This becomes particularly important when Maria notices her pregnant belly. Although this revelation in the scene seems important, there is still little sense of her feelings about her pregnancy and it is given no more weight than the other details Maria encounters during her morning routine.

In *Jeanne Dielman*, the emphasis on surface action in the long take is taken much further and the absence of psychological meaning becomes more striking. Akerman observes Jeanne's various actions attentively, remaining with her for their full duration. Again, her experience of time is made central to the scene, and we share this temporal experience through the long take. But there is no indication of any psychological response in the character to her situation. Her face remains blank throughout the scene, as she goes about her chores in a purely mechanical, robotic manner. The total absence of psychology and strict emphasis on surface action is further reflected by the positioning of the camera, which is always placed at some distance from the character, framing the kitchen in a long shot. Akerman thus allows

²⁶ This point is emphasised by both Marchant and Klevan in their analyses of the scene outlined above.

²⁷ See *Screening Modernism* (Kovács 2007: 124).

us to perceive Jeanne's movements in the space but refrains from psychologising the character with facial close-ups. *Jeanne Dielman*'s elaboration of the disconnect between surface action and underlying meaning presents a more nihilistic vision than in *Umberto D*. In the earlier film, the indeterminacy of what lies beneath the events introduces an optimistic, redemptive quality that marks the neorealist project; it allows the chance to rediscover the world anew. In Akerman's film, however, the action is shown to be pointless and futile. There is no sense of mystery behind the events, only the sense of nothingness, an existential void.

Most recently, Matilda Mroz has elaborated on issues of cinematic duration, with reference to the ideas of Bergson and Deleuze, among others, in *Temporality and Film Analysis* (2012). Mroz's study is not limited to a particular historical period, and her observations are geared towards more global film-theoretical debates. Nonetheless, she takes as her three major examples films by Antonioni, Tarkovsky and Krzysztof Kieślowski, which she acknowledges 'can be seen as canonical works of the "art" cinema' (Mroz 2012: 4). Moreover, the first two of these filmmakers, who both figure prominently in this thesis, are notable practitioners of the long take. Thus, the qualities of duration that Mroz highlights appear to be especially important in the period and practice that form the topic of this thesis. In her work, Mroz turns more specifically to issues of spectatorship, and she is concerned with the way that duration relates not only to our intellectual engagement in film, but also to our affective and sensory experience of the medium. She suggests that 'affective responses can be evoked through the aesthetic processes of the films, through cinematic imaging', and she stresses 'the term *imaging* to imply a process and duration of development' (Mroz 2012: 7). Mroz also argues that 'film theory frequently divorces sensual apprehension and intellectual comprehension ... In the duration of film viewing, however, we can

argue that sense and thought intertwine' (Mroz 2012: 8). She takes Deleuze's ideas about the 'time-image' and its limit-situations as a means by which cinematic experience can move beyond the purely intellectual to become more corporeal. The new filmic forms that Deleuze argues allow time to become distinct from the dictates of movement and action also promote a greater sensory engagement in the film. Mroz writes: 'it is also through such aberrant editing practices' – which includes the long take – 'that indeterminate affect can be evoked in cinema' (Mroz 2012: 37). And she identifies hints of affective and sensory experience in Deleuze's descriptions of the purely optical and sound situations that define the 'time-image'. In particular, Mroz cites Deleuze's comments in which he stresses how these situations aim to make us 'grasp something intolerable and unbearable', which is 'too powerful' or 'too beautiful'.²⁸ Thus, she suggests that by 'upsetting' our 'habitual perception', these purely optical and sound situations allow 'a different type of image (and a different form of affect) to emerge' (Mroz 2012: 38). This alternative form of affective experience, for Mroz, is aligned with the accentuated durational qualities of the image that Deleuze identifies in modern cinema.

Following Mroz's observations, the long take might thus be seen as a technique that can offer a heightened affective or sensory experience, which is closely related to its heightening of our awareness of time in the shot. Where analytical editing tends to stress narrative comprehension, by moving from one significant detail to the next, the long take provides a more holistic experience of the events depicted on screen. Details of the *mise en scène* remain present in the shot that do not function in strict narrative terms or to move the action forward and offer, instead, a more sensory engagement: the tones and textures of environments and objects surrounding the

²⁸ See *Temporality and Film Analysis* (Mroz 2012: 38) and *Cinema 2* (Deleuze 1989: 18).

characters. Furthermore, the lingering shot can also exhaust intellectual engagement and encourage us to encounter the events on screen in a more immediately physical manner. When actions are stretched beyond the point of dramatic necessity and become disconnected from any clear underlying meaning, they encourage a more immediately sensory comprehension.

These affective and sensory consequences of the long take's temporality can also be seen in the examples of *Umberto D* and *Jeanne Dielman*. For instance, De Sica's long takes in the earlier film place Maria within her surrounding environment and allow the physical details of this environment to become notably present to us. We are able to perceive the rough textures of the kitchen walls and the coldness of the stone and tiles that comprise much of the décor. The camera also follows the maid's inactive, lethargic movements down the hallway and in the kitchen, transcribing her weariness as she starts to perform her early-morning routine while still half asleep. Following her moment-by-moment experience, her feelings of tiredness become palpable. Furthermore, as Maria's various chores are not shown to reflect any significant dramatic meaning, merely observed in their uneventfulness, it is their physicality that becomes most noticeable. Her multiple attempts to light a match by striking it on the wall, the water she splashes on her top when filling the pot, her turning of the handle to grind the coffee beans against her stomach; these moments present a set of manual tasks that the film conveys in their actual duration. In *Jeanne Dielman*, these qualities are greatly intensified, which corresponds with Akerman's more radical deployment of the long take. Here, our intellectual engagement in the film is quickly exhausted as the camera remains fixed on the minimal, repetitive activities that Jeanne performs around her apartment: polishing the shoes, grinding coffee, laying the table. In a scene much later in the film, the camera fixes on Jeanne

in the kitchen as she prepares minced meat in her hands, continuously flattening it on a plate, rolling it, then squeezing it through her fingers again and again until it is the right consistency. With all these tasks, after registering the nature of the action (what it is that she is doing) we do not move on to something new, but are held with it until it is completed. The film therefore encourages us to engage with the action in a different way and, in particular, Akerman seems to stress that we should experience the various physical chores as Jeanne experiences them. We are led to feel the laboriousness of the mundane tasks and also to experience, vicariously, their physicality.

Deleuze's insights into modern cinema's preoccupation with time thus indicate a highly influential line of critical thought on the period. His ideas also offer a valuable theory of the long take in modern European cinema, one which is closely related to Bazin's notions of realism but which uncovers a different dimension to many of the same features emphasised by the earlier writer. The qualities of wholeness and continuity in the long take preserve concrete duration, rather than shaping the flow of time around movements in space, and emphasise this experience of duration both in the characters and the spectator. Beginning with neorealism, the crisis of action and subsequent rise of idle periods and limit-situations, which are interconnected with the rejection of analytical editing and the adoption of the long take, brings time forward and makes it a dominant force in the shot. Deleuze's ideas are highly generative in relation to matters of cinematic aesthetics, but in keeping with his primarily philosophical aims, Deleuze is concerned with how films produce concepts, rather than providing specific stylistic analysis. As such, we have seen that he does not delve in great detail into how these notions of temporality open up artistic possibilities for filmmakers. This reluctance to engage with the precise formal

elements of the films discussed marks a limitation in Deleuze's writing for the purposes of style analysis, such as that presented in this thesis. Nonetheless, his work lays a strong foundation from which film critics can uncover the achievements of individual films or particular moments within them. This chapter has already sought to do this to some extent in its preceding analyses by putting Deleuze's ideas in relation to the close details of the chosen examples. Furthermore, it has also examined how critics such as Klevan, Kovács and Mroz turn Deleuze's concepts towards more aesthetic observations, seeing how the 'time-image' leads to new stylistic possibilities. This thesis shall continue in this direction in chapter four by examining how Deleuze's temporal notions underline the qualities of the long take, and its treatment of events, in a single film.

CHAPTER FOUR:

DURATION, MYSTICISM AND MATERIAL TEXTURE IN *STALKER*

‘What is the essence of the director's work? We could define it as sculpting in time’ (Andrei Tarkovsky 1986: 63)

Released at the end of the 1970s, Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979) is a late example of the long-take tradition that follows on from the developments of neorealism in the post-war years. But despite its historical and geographical distance from that earlier movement, and its very different thematic concerns, the film displays a remarkable affinity with the aesthetic qualities that Deleuze discovers in the films of Rossellini and De Sica. Taking its lead from chapter three, my analysis will therefore seek to further investigate the ideas proposed by Deleuze (and, to a lesser extent, Bazin) through the close examination of long takes in this film. The analysis will also attempt to explain how Tarkovsky utilises the broadly defined temporal characteristics of the long take in distinctive ways and for particular purposes, observing in particular how the film establishes a tension between mysticism and immersive materiality.

Based on the Strugatsky brothers' science-fiction novel *Roadside Picnic* (1971), *Stalker* follows the journey of three men from the desolate post-industrial wasteland of their everyday existence into the mysterious and supposedly miraculous realm of the Zone, a forbidden area sealed off and guarded by the authorities. The two travellers known only as the Professor (Nikolai Grinko) and the Writer (Anatoli Solonitsyn) are led by their guide, the monk-like Stalker (Alexander Kaidanovsky), through this abandoned and apparently deadly woodland, littered with the remains of a vanished society. Their goal is to reach a room at the heart of the Zone that has the fabled power to grant the innermost wishes to those who are able to negotiate the

lethal ‘traps’ on route and to enter this space. Despite the potential for extensive movement and action offered by *Stalker*’s science-fiction premise, little takes place in the film in terms of on-screen events. As the action is significantly reduced and the shots are elongated beyond their necessary function to show the developments of the plot, time becomes pressing in the film.

The centrality of time has come to be seen as the most conspicuous feature of Tarkovsky’s filmmaking. This has been influenced to a great extent by the filmmaker’s own theoretical reflections on the cinema, most notably in his book *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema* (1986). Tarkovsky’s ideas are very similar to those of Deleuze (and Bazin before him).¹ As Terence McSweeney points out in his assessment of the relations between Tarkovsky’s film theory and Deleuze’s thinking, ‘the single most prominent unifying factor indicative of the symbiosis between Tarkovsky and Deleuze is the prominent position afforded to temporality in their works and the potential it has to create concepts and meaning in film’ (McSweeney 2006: 85). For Tarkovsky, the cinema is defined by its ability to imprint time, to capture things in their unfolding duration. He closely echoes Bazin’s observations on cinematic ontology when he notes that ‘for the first time in the history of the arts, in the history of culture, man found the means *to take an impression of time ... Time, captured in its factual forms and manifestations*: such is the supreme idea of cinema as an art’ (Tarkovsky 1986: 62-63). Rather than cinema’s narrative function, Tarkovsky emphasises that it is first and foremost defined by its potential to render the unfolding of duration. Thus, like Bazin and Deleuze, Tarkovsky stresses the ontological basis of cinema, in which time becomes

¹ Tarkovsky’s writing, in fact, forms a significant influence on Deleuze’s own work and the philosopher acknowledges the filmmaker’s written work, calling it ‘a text with important implications’ (Deleuze 1989: 42).

particularly significant.² Furthermore, reflecting Deleuze's notions of the 'time-image', Tarkovsky argues that 'the dominant, all-powerful factor of the film image is *rhythm*, expressing the course of time within the frame' (Tarkovsky 1986: 113). He suggests that filmmakers should focus primarily on capturing the flow of time in the shot rather than attempting to shape the unfolding of the film to fit the dictates of narrative or dramatic action: 'time in a shot has to flow independently and with dignity' (Tarkovsky 1986: 120). Editing, Tarkovsky argues, should work only to bring together these pre-existing blocks of time that are already captured in the shots, what he calls 'time-pressure'.³ For this reason, Tarkovsky privileges the long take, as it is through the continuous shot that the 'rhythms' and the 'pressure' of time can surface and develop most fully in the cinematic image, without disruption or manipulation.

Tarkovsky's filmmaking, and his long-take practice in particular, has been considered subsequently in the light of the temporal emphasis outlined in the filmmaker's theoretical writings. Mark Le Fanu, for example, in his early discussion of *Stalker*, observes that 'the director examines the meaning of time within the scope of a series of extended sequence shots', suggesting that 'he appears to be interested in bringing into the protocols of narrative art something of the experience (the rhythms, the patience, even the boredom) of real experienced human time' (Le Fanu 1987: 93). Slavoj Žižek similarly identifies this concern with time in Tarkovsky's film, placing it more closely in relation to the theoretical framework outlined in this thesis. He recognises 'an effect of temporal anamorphosis, extending the dragging of time well beyond what we perceive as justified by the requirements of narrative movement', commenting that 'perhaps Tarkovsky is the clearest example of what Deleuze called

² Despite the close similarities between Tarkovsky's comments and Bazin's, the filmmaker does not acknowledge the earlier writer's influence or make any mention of Bazin in *Sculpting in Time*.

³ See *Sculpting in Time* (Tarkovsky 1986: 116-121).

the time-image replacing the movement-image' (Žižek 2001: 102). Picking up on this connection, Anna Powell further examines *Stalker* in relation to Deleuze's and the filmmaker's own theoretical reflections, noting that: 'external action and character interaction are suspended at times almost to zero as the movement-image is displaced by the time-image ... [Tarkovsky] describes his work as "sculpting in time" and the events of *Stalker* are temporal rather than spatial' (Powell 2007: 138). In his most recent study of the filmmaker, Nariman Skakov also notes 'the unhurried and elongated nature of Tarkovsky's films', in which the long take 'invites the viewer to put aside the narrative framework and to contemplate time in its pure form' (Skakov 2012: 1-3). Echoing the previous critics, Skakov also aligns these temporal preoccupations with Deleuze's ideas, and he suggests that some of the most illuminating observations on Tarkovsky's filmmaking are directly connected to the philosopher's concept of the 'time-image'.⁴ This chapter will continue this line of critical thought and it will also build on the previous observations by examining Tarkovsky's precise temporal strategies within the long take, questioning how time becomes the dominant feature of the shot with reference to particular examples. This analysis shall also consider the resulting effects of these temporal strategies on our understanding and experience of the film, relating Tarkovsky's achievements in *Stalker* to the wider tradition of long-take filmmaking examined in this thesis.

Wholeness, Continuity and Duration

In *Stalker*, Tarkovsky shares the concerns of Welles and the neorealists to maintain the wholeness of the events through the long take, by which he is able to preserve their concrete duration, and thus allows us to experience time directly in the film.

⁴ See *The Cinema of Tarkovsky: Labyrinths of Space and Time* (Skakov 2012: 4-5).

Tarkovsky purposely avoids using conventional methods of analytical editing to structure the film's presentation of time around movement and action in sensory-motor situations. Instead, he employs extensive long takes, which often extend to sequence shots, depicting the characters' interactions without disturbing the physical relations between the elements of the *mise en scène* and their continuity in time. Duration is therefore no longer made subservient to the developments of the action and only represented indirectly, as in the classically edited scene, but is maintained in the shot and also becomes its defining feature.

The film's concern to maintain the continuity of duration through the long take becomes apparent from the very beginning of the film, in the period leading up to and including the meeting of the three main characters, before they set off on their journey to the Zone. This is demonstrated, for example, when the three men assemble in a bar, where they introduce themselves and the Writer and the Professor then discuss their reasons for going to the Zone, while the Stalker listens silently. The camera initially frames the space of the bar in a long shot, showing the Stalker greeting the barman in the background. The Professor, who has already arrived, is standing at a table in the middle of the room. He starts to collect up his bag but the Stalker tells him that he has time to finish his coffee. The Writer then enters the shot and asks the other men if they want a drink before they depart. He places a liquor bottle on the table and collects some glasses from the counter, but the Stalker pulls him away and tells the Writer to put away the alcohol. After making a sarcastic comment about the refusal to drink, the Writer orders some beers from the bar, downs a glass in a single swig and carries the other glasses to the table to join the other characters. As he does this, the Stalker introduces the men using their pseudonyms of 'Professor' and 'Writer'. The Professor asks the Writer about his work and the Writer

then asks in return what type of scientist the Professor is; the Professor replies that he is a physicist. The Writer then delivers a long, cynical monologue about the pointlessness of science and his disenchantment with his own work. The characters then move on to discuss their reasons for going to the Zone. The Professor explains his scientific curiosity and then asks the other man about his motivation; the Writer replies that he has lost his inspiration. The Stalker then interrupts the conversation, informing them it is time to leave. The Professor and Writer collect their things and walk out of the shot toward the door. Alone in the frame, the Stalker turns around and calls to the barman in the backroom, telling him to call on his wife if he does not return. The Stalker then turns to look at his colleagues off-screen and the shot cuts to a reverse framing to show the three men as they exit the bar.



Fig. 4.1 *Stalker* (1979)

In this scene, Tarkovsky avoids editing and, in particular, the use of shot/reverse-shot cutting to shape both space and time around the developments of the action, and to focus more closely on the characters' exchanges. The discussions of the Professor and the Writer provide significant information relating to the film's narrative and to the psychological state of the two men. In particular, the dialogue explains the reason why these two characters wish to visit the supposedly supernatural and prohibited realm of the Zone, which relates to the professions that defines their existence in the film; the Professor wants to scientifically investigate the Zone's 'miracles', while the Writer is seeking the artistic inspiration that he has lost (though these declared motivations ultimately turn out to be wrong). Furthermore, the discussions also reveal important psychological features of these two central protagonists, conveying the reserved seriousness and rationality of the Professor, which contrasts with the sarcastic, cynical and nihilistic outlook of the Writer. The distinctions between the two men are also further reflected when the Professor refuses to join the Writer in a 'drink for the road', opting instead to stick with his coffee. Both men are contrasted with the Stalker, however, who does not engage in the discussions but remains silent, appearing particularly anxious and distracted by his own thoughts. He remains much more mysterious and enigmatic than the other two men.

Using the long take, Tarkovsky refuses to structure the scene in a sensory-motor situation based around these details and the revelations provided by the dialogue. The shot therefore demonstrates the shift from an emphasis on action to an emphasis on time that, according to Deleuze, defines modern cinema. Deleuze writes that, in the 'time-image', 'it is as if the action floats in the situation, rather than bringing it to a conclusion or strengthening it' (Deleuze 1989: 4). This is precisely what happens in this long take. The character details that are disclosed in the scene

through the dialogue and their performances arise within the flow of time that Tarkovsky captures with his camera, rather than determining its unfolding. Tarkovsky maintains the wholeness and continuity of the action through the long take. He respects the spatial integrity of the events and the physical relations between the elements of the *mise en scène* as the scene unfolds. At the same time, and most importantly, Tarkovsky also preserves the temporal continuity of the scene, allowing the action to play out in its moment-by-moment duration. As Beasley-Murray suggests, in Tarkovsky's use of the long take, 'the bodily sensation of time is prioritized over its narrative disjunctive coding. In watching this take, we experience a spatial and temporal unity ... an inhabitation of the real' (Beasley-Murray 1997: 49). The shot presents the scene in its totality, which makes the experience of time immediate, encompassing both the characters in the fiction and our experience of the scene in a single duration.

Another important feature of the shot, relating to its duration, is the movement of the camera. As the scene in the bar unfolds continuously through the long take, the camera also zooms forward incrementally, reframing from the initial long shot that encompasses the space of the location to settle, at the end of the take, on a medium shot of the Stalker, alone at the table. The movement is barely noticeable and the significant shift in the framing only becomes apparent after some time. Furthermore, it is not motivated by movement or action in the space. Ordinarily, camera movement is used to follow the characters or particular objects through the wider space of the scene, or to reveal certain details of the *mise en scène* to the spectator. In other words, it is motivated by spatial perspective. Here, however, the slow forward zoom appears disconnected from the development of the events depicted. It is not used to follow the movement of the characters, who either move in the depth of the shot or remain

stationary at the table, and neither does it reveal any significant details to us within the environment. The camera movement does not function in relation to space or action, but is instead related to the shot's temporal dimension. As the frame progresses slowly-but-steadily forwards, it rhymes with, and becomes a visual manifestation of, the continuous flow of duration captured in the scene. Just as time is unshaped by action in the shot, continuing to unfold regardless of the movements that take place within it, so the camera's framing of the space shifts continuously forward without being determined by the developments of the characters' interactions. The camera movement not only reflects the scene's unfolding duration in visual terms but also works to emphasise the temporality of the shot, calling our attention to the flow of time itself.

The main 'action' throughout the following scenes in *Stalker*, as the characters make their journey through the derelict landscape of the Zone, comprises a series of conversations, like the one in the bar, where the men frequently engage in dialogues or arguments about the Zone and their thoughts on science, art and other subjects of human society. When the men first arrive in the Zone, for instance, the Stalker tells his companions the story of 'Porcupine', another stalker that was the protagonist's mentor. When the Stalker leaves to go into the woods alone, the Professor and the Writer continue the conversation, revealing 'Porcupine's' suicide after returning from the Zone, and discussing the Stalker's own troubled past, including his daughter's alleged mutations resulting from his contact with the alien environment. These narrative revelations offer some insight into the otherwise highly ambiguous nature of the Zone and the film's title character. But Tarkovsky's camera does not focus on their exchanges. Instead, it presents the scene in a single long take, starting out as a deep-focus long shot, framing the landscape and the characters within it, who are

sitting on the flatcar at some distance. The camera then tracks, almost imperceptibly, to settle beside the Professor and the Writer at the end of the railway line. This approach is further demonstrated later in the film, for example, when the Stalker throws a metal pipe at the Writer to stop him pulling a plant from the ground, which sparks an argument between the two men about the dangers of the Zone, and then also in the final altercation on the threshold of the miraculous room, where the Stalker attempts to wrestle the bomb away from the Professor as he prepares to blow-up the Zone. In all of these scenes, rather than cutting around the interactions of the characters to shape the film's presentation according to their sensory-motor exchanges, the camera captures the action as a whole, stressing the flow of duration which is undetermined by the developments of the dialogue. This is also most often combined with a slow-moving camera, as in the previous scene at the bar, which is distinct from the developments of the action and visually emphasises the temporal continuity of the shots.

In *Stalker*, Tarkovsky maintains the wholeness and continuity of the events through the long take, which encompasses the world on screen in all its details. This approach recalls Bazin's observations on the realist aesthetics of the long take, which he finds in Welles's films and in neorealism. In particular, this idea relates to his notions of perceptual realism in the long take and the way that the technique brings us into a relationship with the film image that more closely emulates our ordinary experience in the world. In an interview on his second film, *Andrei Rublev* (1966), Tarkovsky expresses his own concern for realism in the long take and his comments closely reflect Bazin's suggestions. Tarkovsky states that: 'I consider cinema to be the most realistic art in so far as its principles are based on its identification with reality,

on the fixing of reality in every separately filmed shot', and his concern with realism is closely associated with the temporal continuity of the long take:

The more realistic the image, the nearer it is to life, the more time becomes authentic – meaning, not fabricated, not recreated ... of course it is fabricated and recreated, but it approaches reality to such a point that it merges with it. (Tarkovsky in Ciment et al. 2006: 19)

For Tarkovsky our experience of time in the long take leads to a greater sense of realism. Even though he acknowledges the artifices of the filmmaking process, like Bazin, Tarkovsky stresses that our perception of time in the film is most important. In *Stalker*, Tarkovsky expands on the temporal qualities that Bazin identifies in the kitchen scene from De Sica's *Umberto D* by avoiding ellipsis and its subsequent abstraction of the events within the scenes. In this way, *Stalker* continues the tradition of its neorealist predecessor, pursuing what Bazin calls 'a truly realist cinema of time ... a cinema of "duration"' (Bazin 1971: 76). The continuity of duration in scenes such as the one where the three characters meet in the bar, or when they first arrive in the Zone, and the resultant temporal realism, also impacts on our experience of space and action. These features of the image, likewise, retain a state of integrity that Bazin argues is central to the ontological realism of the long take.

But critics have noted that Tarkovsky's long takes often challenge Bazinian ideas of wholeness and integrity by purposely undermining these very qualities in the shot. Benjamin Halligan, in particular, argues that 'maybe it is mistaken to consider Tarkovsky's utilisation of his most characteristic filmic technique – the long take – as a striving towards the capturing of a simultaneously phenomenological whole and self-possessed reality', and he suggests that 'perhaps a turn to Bazin's seminal theorising about the long take creates a partial or limited context in which to consider Tarkovsky's film form ... since Tarkovsky constantly assails Bazinian realism in his *mise-en-scène*' (Halligan 2006: 42-43). Halligan emphasises Tarkovsky's 'inclusion

of a cohort of anti-materialist concerns' in his films, noting his particular interest in hallucinatory and dream states (Halligan 2006: 43). Vlada Petric also observes that Tarkovsky's films are more generally suffused with 'an *oneiric air* – a dreamlike impact – which resists the audience's need to verify the logic, as well as the credibility, of the events presented on the screen' (Petric 1989: 28). This turn towards the representation of alternative states that are not tied firmly to objective, physical reality calls into question the extent to which Tarkovsky's long-take style might be seen in the light of Bazin's understanding of neorealist aesthetics.

The most notable feature of Tarkovsky's long take that writers have associated with his dream-like aesthetic is its frustration of the very spatio-temporal unity that the technique is supposed to deliver to allow a more realistic experience of the events. Instead, critics have pointed to the discontinuous nature of the shots, where space is fragmented and its solidity is undermined not through the juxtapositions of editing but through the seemingly continuous flow of duration. Vida Johnson and Graham Petrie note that one of the major stylistic features throughout Tarkovsky's cinema is 'the creation of logically incompatible space within the compass of a single shot: the same character will be seen in a series of different spaces or positions that cannot be rationally accounted for' (Johnson and Petrie 1994: 195). Furthermore, Robert Bird argues that where Bazin sees the 'continuum of reality' in the long take, 'Tarkovsky calls the continuum itself into question; time appears not as a flow, but as a seam that sutures folds in space. Tarkovsky's long takes undermine the possibility of their own continuity' (Bird 2008: 202). For Skakov, this feature becomes central to Tarkovsky's filmmaking and he argues that 'its distinctive essence lies in the fact that it amplifies the discontinuity of the filmic experience' (Skakov 2012: 11). This is expressed particularly in the long take, which 'is infiltrated from time to time by ghostly

apparitions, which undermine the seeming totality ... A homogenous, stretched space is invaded by heterogeneous spectral apparitions: spatial disorientation reigns supreme' (Skakov 2012: 219). This effect becomes most apparent in *Stalker* when the characters lay down beside a river to rest and a series of images follow that appear to evoke the Stalker's semi-conscious dream state. At one point, the film cuts to a close-up of the Stalker's face, with his eyes closed, while on the soundtrack his wife reads a biblical passage in voiceover. The camera tracks upwards, away from the Stalker's face to survey a series of discarded objects immersed in the shallow water: a syringe, a mirror, coins, a religious icon, a rusted machine gun and so on. The camera continues its upward movement to settle, finally, on the Stalker's arm, stretched out in the water. The spatial continuity of the shot thus appears to be contradicted as we can see the camera continue in a single direction, moving upwards and away from the Stalker's face, which is laying upwards, only to settle on him once more, but further along the river and now laying face down. Such spatial incoherence within the temporal continuity of the long take does challenge realist notions about the shot and, instead, the effect is more surreal and dream-like, in line with the nature of the event the film is depicting.

Despite these observations, however, the extent to which Tarkovsky's long takes foster a hallucinatory or dream-like appearance through spatial incongruity tends to be overstated. In *Stalker*, the overwhelming majority of the scenes do, in fact, maintain the concrete unity of the events through the long take. Tarkovsky only challenges this approach at particular moments, such as in the scene depicting the Stalker's dream-state. Furthermore, such discontinuities in this scene and elsewhere are actually most often created through editing, rather than the long take. Recognising the inherent abstracting possibilities of editing, Tarkovsky employs what Deleuze

calls ‘irrational cutting’ and ‘false continuity’ to create the general sense of disorientation. The shot in which the camera moves away from the Stalker to settle on him once more in another position is an isolated example, rather than the general pattern of the scene. The long take in *Stalker* is more typically represented in scenes such as the meeting in the bar, or the arrival in the Zone, which do stress the wholeness and continuity of time, space and action that Bazin recognises in the technique.

But Tarkovsky’s film does complicate notions of realism while, for the most part, maintaining wholeness and continuity in the shot. Tarkovsky’s long-take practice is defined by a dialectical approach between realism and formal abstraction that we find in the work of other filmmakers such as Antonioni and Akerman. On the one hand, Tarkovsky’s long take respects the integrity of the scene, which allows the world to exist on the screen without the abstractions of editing. On the other hand, however, Bird points out that ‘his camera is constantly reminding us of itself, and nowhere more insistently than in his long tracking shots’ (Bird 2008: 189). Unlike Antonioni in *Cronaca di un amore*, Tarkovsky does not draw attention to the presence of the camera through geometric compositions and a highly mobile frame. Unlike Akerman in *Jeanne Dielman*, Tarkovsky also does not employ ‘hyperrealist’ repetition in the performances to stress the constructed nature of the action. In Tarkovsky’s film, the tension between realism and form is stressed primarily through time in the shot. Kolker touches on this issue in general terms when he questions Bazin’s notions about temporal realism in the long take. He points out that ‘the longer we gaze at an image the more we become aware that we are gazing at an image and not a replica’, and he argues that, in the extended shot, ‘we get caught not only in its drama, but in its very presence as an image of considerable duration’ (Kolker 1983:

150-151). Richard Dienst also considers this dialectic in which ‘the whole conflict between cinema and life is restaged in every shot’, and he stresses that this conflict becomes increasingly pressing as the shot’s duration is extended: ‘if it is left running too long, it will spring a leak in the world and drain it of its energy, leaving us with nothing but cinema’ (Dienst 2000: 36). These ideas are reflected especially in Tarkovsky’s film, as the camera’s intensive observation of the scene, over an extended period, reveals not only the real time of the events but also calls our attention to the duration of the shot itself.⁵ Bird writes that: ‘the camera seems reluctant to loosen its grip, as if its gaze is the only thing keeping the world from crumbling’ (Bird 2008: 189). Indeed, for Bird, this emphasis on the camera’s presence is central to Tarkovsky’s work more generally. He writes: ‘Tarkovsky’s entire cinematic project was aimed precisely at exploring the cinematic apparatus and investigating its impact upon human experience – as much sensory as intellectual and spiritual’ (Bird 2008: 12). We should not see this concern with cinematic form as an abandonment of its realist possibilities, however. In exploring the cinematic apparatus and its impact on our experience, as Bird suggests, Tarkovsky’s long takes emphasise both the medium’s ability to photographically render the concrete unfolding of events in real time as well as the shot’s own duration, reflecting the camera’s perspective in relation to the events.

Inaction and the Temporalised Body

The durational autonomy that Tarkovsky captures through the long take in *Stalker* is further stressed by a significant reduction of action within the shots. Tarkovsky’s film further demonstrates its lineage with neorealism by enacting a crisis of action,

⁵ The incremental movement of the camera, undetermined by developments of the action in the scene also plays a significant role in calling attention to the duration of the shot.

whereby the characters engage in a drifting ‘modern voyage’ through the ‘any-space-whatever’ that constitutes the environments of *Stalker*. The journey that constitutes the subject of *Stalker*’s narrative is a seemingly clear and simple one. The camera follows the three main characters, who remain together throughout the majority of the film, and they have a clear goal, which is established from the start of their trip. But when the men arrive in the Zone, the journey transpires to be more haphazard and indeterminate than the film’s plot suggests. The nature of the journey recalls Harriet’s movements through the war-torn city of Florence in *Paisà* and the wandering of Antonio and Bruno through the poor districts of Rome in *Bicycle Thieves*. In these earlier films, the characters’ journeys each have a definite purpose; Harriet must rendezvous with the partisan leader Guido, while Antonio needs to find his stolen bicycle. But for both, getting to their destination turns out to be much less straightforward, and the goal ultimately remains unachieved. In *Stalker*, the three characters embark on their trip to the Zone to reach the miraculous room at its centre, where their wishes will be granted. However, despite the close proximity of the location when they first arrive in the Zone, they must take elaborate detours through the landscape to eventually reach the room, for as the Stalker tells them, it is much safer to take the long route. And when the characters do arrive on the threshold of their destination neither the Professor nor the Writer enter to make their wish. Thus, the goal of the journey is unfulfilled in the end.

Throughout the film, Tarkovsky’s long takes reinforce the aimless ‘modern voyage’ of the three men in ‘any-space-whatever’, where their movements become less a progression through space than an undirected shifting in time. As Beasley-Murray writes, ‘Tarkovsky’s long take ... initiates a nomad wandering, the “modern voyage” ... in and through a material, smooth time’ (Beasley-Murray 1997: 49).

Stalker offers no establishing shots or sense of continuity between the individual long takes, which would allow some sense of geography in the film, and as such the characters' journey through space become unclear. But within the shot itself, movement and space are also made uncertain and indeterminate. The long takes, which are often combined with deep-focus composition, place the characters firmly within the surrounding landscapes of the film, the 'undifferentiated fabrics', which Deleuze points out are 'opposed to the determined spaces' of the 'movement-image' (Deleuze 1986: 212). This is reflected both in the post-industrial wasteland where the characters first meet and in the discarded and deserted territory of the Zone. When the three men set off on their journey they have to negotiate their way through backstreets, vast abandoned factories and railway shunting yards in order to reach the flatcar they will ride into the forbidden area of the Zone. Armed guards also patrol this environment to stop intruders such as the three characters. Their route through this borderland therefore becomes complicated and uncertain, as they navigate safe passages through various dilapidated buildings strewn with metal debris and overgrown or waterlogged pathways, avoiding the guards who ride around on motorbikes. These spatial features become even more pronounced when the characters enter the Zone and make their way through the landscape to the wish-room at its centre. The Zone is defined by overgrown and wild foliage, which is littered with the remains of vehicles, buildings and underground tunnels. In this environment there are no clear paths of movement and the environment tends to frustrate rather than facilitate action. Furthermore, their movements are also constrained and made uncertain by the potentially deadly, alien environment that the Stalker tells us is in a constant state of flux; safe passages become impassable and others can open up at any

moment. The travellers have to follow the direction of small bolts tied to strips of gauze, which they throw ahead before continuing forward.

The uncertainty and instability of space and its effects on movement in the long take are not only restrained to what is depicted within the shot, however. An even more striking feature of Tarkovsky's long takes is the tension they establish between the details in the frame and the off-screen space that surrounds it. Astrid Söderbergh Widding notes that where Tarkovsky's filmic space is often 'defined by its pictorial fullness ... and the unifying principle that the long takes provide', the shots also 'break up the supposedly unified space of the long takes, introducing a new kind of filmic space, constantly oscillating between visible and invisible, what is shown to the spectator and what remains hidden' (Widding 2006: 152). Widding argues that where off-screen space 'has often been considered as an imaginary extension of screen space', in Tarkovsky's films, 'the spectator's possible hypotheses of off screen space are constantly challenged ... it is impossible to know exactly what might be awaited outside the frame' (Widding 2006: 152). In *Stalker*, this uncertainty about the space extending beyond the frame, which is maintained through the long take, becomes a significant factor shaping the indeterminate nature of the landscape and the characters' movements within it.

Off-screen space in the long take becomes especially important in relation to the Zone's disorientating, shifting geography and deadly 'traps' that the Stalker stresses to his companions. This is demonstrated particularly in the 'dry-tunnel' sequence, where the characters' progression ultimately returns them to the same spot, beside a passageway and a tiled wall. The scene begins on a close-up of the Writer's face as he surveys his surroundings, and the camera then pulls back slightly to reveal the location where he and the Professor had earlier settled down to rest. The camera

then tracks sideways to reveal an immense waterfall behind the arches of a crumbling wall as the roaring sound of the water dominates the soundtrack. The camera brings the Writer into shot once more, who looks around in astonishment at the environment that appears so drastically changed from when he was previously here moments before. He moves forward to stand back-to-back with the Stalker as the camera frames them in a two-shot. The Stalker informs him that this is the 'dry-tunnel' and when the Writer asks sarcastically about the name, his guide tells him: 'it is a local joke, normally you have to swim here'. The camera then continues forward with the men and they come to a darkened passage in the wall. At this point, the Writer realises that the Professor has disappeared and the men concede that he must have perished trying to return to retrieve his knapsack, which was left back at the tiled wall (and still present there at the start of the shot, when the camera passes the space for the second time). The Writer asks if they should wait for the Professor but the Stalker reminds him that they cannot because 'things change here every minute', and they move into the darkness of the tunnel. The film then cuts to a tracking shot, surveying the waterlogged ground while the voices of the Stalker and the Writer continue from out of shot. This is followed by another shot that picks up the two men arriving at the tiled wall for a third time. They exit the passageway to find the Professor sitting beside his knapsack, drinking coffee from his thermos. When asked how he overtook them, the Professor replies that he only went back for his bag, and at this point the Stalker realises that this is one of the Zone's 'traps'.

In this scene, the long take creates a tension between what we can see in the frame and what lies beyond it. The landscape becomes uncertain and indeterminate as the two characters move through it, and there is no sense of their spatial progression. They appear to be moving forward but they end up returning to the location that they

passed previously. Not only this, but they meet the Professor once they arrive here, despite the fact that, as he tells them, he went back the other way. The scene appears disorientating because no sense of geography is established that would allow us, and the characters, to grasp a sense of their direction. And it is through the largely unseen nature of the space that the Zone also frustrates any clear progression. Through this tension between on-screen and off-screen space the journey of the three men becomes seemingly aimless and aleatory.



Fig. 4.2 *Stalker* (1979)

The crisis of action that occurs in *Stalker* leads to a proliferation of idle periods and limit-situations that allow duration to become the dominant feature of the shot. These notions that follow from Deleuze's assessment of neorealism are reflected in critical responses to *Stalker*, which often point to Tarkovsky's rejection of narrative action. Le Fanu notes that, in the film, 'we are met with something that can only be

described as an elevation of powerlessness, a hostility to conventional action, a quietism' (Le Fanu 1987: 96). For Maya Turovskaya, the film is characterised by its 'minimalism', both in relation to the plot structure and its visual treatment generally.⁶ Bird similarly points out that, frequently in the film, narrative action 'is not only reduced to the barest minimum, but at key moments threatens to come completely apart' (Bird 2008: 162). By employing extensive long takes, Tarkovsky stretches these insignificant or banal events to their limits, which, as Powell suggests, 'impact on and alter our awareness of time' (Powell 2007: 138). These shots heighten the experience of duration, both in relation to the characters in the film and to the spectator, over temporal determination by the developments of action or movements in space. This becomes clear from the very first shot in the film. The screen opens to a long shot of the darkened bar where the three characters will later meet before embarking on their journey to the Zone. Here the camera observes the barman as he enters the room from a door at the rear and prepares to open for business. He lights a cigarette and then switches on the lights, staring up at one of the florescent tubes as it flickers. The barman walks round to the other side of the bar counter and at this point another man enters from behind the camera, who we later learn to be the Professor. He approaches the bar to order something from the barman and then settles at the table in the middle of the room. The barman then brings over a pot of coffee, pours some into a cup for the Professor and then heads back to the counter. He comes back and stares at the flickering light once more, exchanging a few words with the Professor about it and then disappears into the backroom. He closes the door and for the remaining duration of the shot, we observe the Professor as he leans on the table, sipping his coffee, while he waits pensively for the other characters to arrive.

⁶ See *Tarkovsky: Cinema as Poetry* (Turovskaya 1989: 109-110).



Fig. 4.3 *Stalker* (1979)

In this opening scene, Tarkovsky builds on the approach demonstrated by De Sica in the kitchen scene in *Umberto D*. Like the earlier film, Tarkovsky's camera lingers on the minor actions of a character performing banal, everyday morning tasks; the barman sets about opening his establishment for customers. The filmmaker avoids editing to structure the scene around the character's completion of tasks and to increase the pacing of the action. Instead, the camera stresses his experience of time as he goes about his routines, completing the various necessary chores in a largely disengaged manner. Deleuze, in his preface to his volume on the 'time-image', notes that 'even the body is no longer exactly what moves; subject of movement or the instrument of action, it becomes rather the developer of time, it shows time through its tiredness and waitings' (Deleuze 1989: xi). This opening scene in *Stalker*, like the kitchen scene from *Umberto D*, demonstrates this idea especially as the camera

lingers on the figures, performing their minor actions.⁷ It is not movements that are stressed here, the chain of action that is aimed towards a significant outcome, but rather the experience of duration itself, which becomes increasingly prominent as the actions are reduced and stripped of any sense of dramatic significance. In *Stalker*, this approach becomes more pointed than its neorealist predecessor, as the scene is presented in a single shot, framing all the action in a single space and from a distance. The unfolding duration of the events is unbroken by any cuts and the extensive length of the shot stretches the inactive situation to its limits, making time more intensely felt in the scene. This becomes particularly clear towards the end of the shot, when the barman leaves and we are left with the Professor, who remains still, merely sipping his coffee and waiting.

The camera's intensive observation of the characters in periods of inaction becomes a notable feature that is often repeated in the film. As the three men make their way through the Zone they engage in little action, for the most part merely walking around and observing the surrounding landscape and its various details. They assume the role more of 'seers' rather than 'agents', and their observations do not lead into action or provoke reactive responses; they explore the ambiguous landscape together with the camera, surveying its various details but without organising them into a coherent underlying structure. Although the Zone poses a constant danger to the men, as the Stalker frequently tells them, this is rarely manifested. As Bird notes, 'the physical evidence for the Zone and the Room of Desires is almost entirely circumstantial' (Bird 2008: 162). As a result, the characters' engagement with the environment is largely inactive and lethargic. They amble through the different terrains of the Zone, often setting down to rest for extended periods. In one of the

⁷ This is also reflected in the example from Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman* discussed in chapter three.

film's most striking scenes, they settle beside a river and fall asleep, while the camera surveys the surrounding environment through the lens of the Stalker's semi-conscious dream-state. And when the men finally reach their destination in the Zone, following the altercation around the Professor's bomb, nobody enters the room. Instead, they sit down on the waterlogged ground just outside, looking into the space, largely silent and still, as the camera pulls back into the room and a short rain shower falls onto the saturated ground inside. The film then moves back to the outside world again, showing the men back in the bar drinking beer; their return journey is omitted.

These minor events, which make up much of the film, are intensified through Tarkovsky's use of the long take, which remains focused on the characters' inaction for extended durations, where the body's experience of time is revealed over its actions in space. As Klevan suggests, Tarkovsky cultivates a 'melodrama of time' in the film through his use of the long take.⁸ He takes the ordinary and undramatic events depicted in the scenes, like the barman's opening routine, or the protagonists' tedious movements through the Zone, where supernatural developments rarely seem to manifest themselves, and pushes them to the point where they become much more visually and temporally dramatic situations. Moreover, it is through this heightened state of tension, created by the film's stretching of time in the shot, that the otherwise mundane and decrepit landscape of the Zone assumes its appearance of strangeness and ambiguity. Turovskaya notes that, in *Stalker*, Tarkovsky develops an 'aesthetics of "estrangement"', of making the everyday seem unexpected', which he achieves not through fantastical special effects but, instead, through the 'minimalism' of the images (Turovskaya 1989: 110). Johnson and Petrie also state that, through 'the slow, inexorable pacing of individual shots ... the everyday world in all its commonplace

⁸ See *Disclosure of the Everyday* (Klevan 2000: 45-46).

and often sordid reality is authentically transformed and made strange' (Johnson and Petrie 1994: 153). This estrangement of the events and objects depicted in the film results from the way that the long takes stretch the temporal dimension of the images. And throughout the film, the dominance of time over action introduces a hypnotic quality into the events that makes them more dramatically engaging than they initially appear to be.

Tarkovsky's emphasis on limit-situations in the long take is epitomised in *Stalker* in the famous scene where the characters ride a flatcar from the border into the Zone. Here, action and movement are reduced almost to the point of stasis, which produces a radical example of the shift from a focus on movement to a focus on the pure flow of time that marks both Deleuze's and Tarkovsky's theoretical writings. Johnson and Petrie note that at this moment in the film 'Tarkovsky perhaps comes closest to creating the "pure cinema" – working solely in terms of time, sound, and images – that he dreamed of in *Sculpting in Time*' (Johnson and Petrie 1994: 155). Throughout the scene the characters sit in silence on the flatcar, simply waiting to arrive at their destination. The Stalker looks ahead, pensively awaiting their arrival, while the Professor looks around, simply observing the passing landscape without processing or responding to what he sees. But it is the Writer whose behaviour most notably expresses the lethargic quality of the scene; with nothing to do, he falls asleep on the back of the flatcar for some time before being awoken by a bump in the track. The sheer immobility of the three characters in this scene thus works to reveal time most emphatically through the waiting and the tiredness of the body that Deleuze

suggests; action is literally eradicated in the scene as the camera observes these temporalised bodies, experiencing the duration of the trip.⁹

The static appearance of the flatcar scene is also emphasised by the positioning of the camera, which focuses on the faces of the men in close-up, blurring the background and excluding the wider environment for the most part. Here, Tarkovsky first introduces the notable tension surrounding off-screen space that will continue to be important when the men travel through the Zone. Only twice does the camera briefly pan away from the characters to take in some of the passing landscape. By isolating their faces from the context of the environment and limiting our own views of it, Tarkovsky shifts attention away from the characters' movement through space to stress, instead, their progression through time; the journey becomes temporal rather than spatial. Any sense of the flatcar's direction in relation to its surrounding geography is rendered obscure and Tarkovsky creates the impression of fixity more than movement. Powell writes that in this scene, the characters are set against 'a blurred landscape that looks like a back projection. Yet, there *is* something moving profoundly in this sequence: time itself' (Powell 2007: 137). Although the spatial coordinates of the railway line, and the flatcar's movement on it, towards the Zone remains largely unseen and marginalised, we do experience with the characters the passing time it takes to get there, waiting-out the duration from one location to another. We are aware that a movement has taken place, but this movement is conveyed primarily through time rather than space.

⁹ The scene is not presented in a single shot, but is actually comprised of five separate takes. Three of these are quite lengthy, while two are relatively brief. Despite the cuts (which may have been forced by production restrictions), they do not function in relation to developments in action, but appear more random and rhythmic in their deployment, and the overall effect of the scene is still one of continuity.



Fig. 4.4 *Stalker* (1979)

This specifically temporal progression depicted in the scene is further emphasised through the sound. The soundtrack is primarily rhythmic, initially dominated by the knocking of the wheels against the tracks. This noise is then gradually overwhelmed by the steadily increasing volume of the electronic music, with its strange and hypnotic qualities: whipping, clicking sounds and an underlying whirr of synthesisers, all heavily echoed and reverberated. The sound also becomes increasingly energetic over the course of the scene, getting louder and more complex as time unfolds (more sounds are introduced as it goes on), which suggests the characters' approaching proximity to the Zone. But like the visual dimension of the scene, the soundtrack also tends to exclude the surrounding landscape, audibly cutting the characters off from their fixture into space and instead placing them in a rhythmic, temporalised state. Johnson and Petrie argue that, 'in *Stalker* time exists only to the

extent that it is coterminous with the space traversed by the characters; beyond that there is literally no means of judging or assessing it', and they specify that 'the extensive use of the long take, which traps us within the protagonists' subjectivity, is particularly important in removing any external guidelines beyond their own immediate perception' (Johnson and Petrie 1994: 237). However, as this scene demonstrates in particular, it is rather space that exists only to the extent of its integration with time. The geography traversed by the characters when they ride the flatcar is conveyed only through the period of time it takes to get from the warehouse where they set off to the end of the line inside the Zone. Thus, we cannot judge or assess space in the scene (and, by extension, in the film more generally) beyond its existence within the blocks of duration captured in the shots. The long takes certainly 'trap us' within the characters' subjectivity, as Johnson and Petrie suggest, but this is more specifically their temporal experience, within a shared duration, which removes any clear spatial guidelines.

Mysticism and Material Texture

Tarkovsky's use of the long take in *Stalker* and its temporal emphasis aligns him with the filmmakers discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis. But Tarkovsky adopts this style for a different purpose to each of his predecessors. In *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons*, Welles draws on the wholeness and continuity provided by the deep-focus long take to achieve a dramatic unity within the events, where the tension builds in real time to the point of completion. In the neorealist films of Rossellini and De Sica, the long take places the characters in relation to their material environment to show how their actions are shaped by the wider social and political forces at work in the situation. And in *Cronaca di un amore*, Antonioni also places

the characters within their physical and social environment, but he does so to reveal its impact on their inner, psychological states. Tarkovsky's filmmaking has often been seen to differ from these largely secular interests by utilising time in the long take in relation to more spiritual concerns, directing us towards a mystical and transcendental realm that exists beyond the physical world depicted in the frame.

This spiritual quality, underlining Tarkovsky's use of the long take, is suggested by some of the filmmaker's own comments in *Sculpting in Time*. For example, in his discussion about rhythm and editing, Tarkovsky states that 'the image is tied to the concrete and the material, yet reaches out along mysterious paths to regions beyond the spirit' (Tarkovsky 1986: 114-116). Tarkovsky also emphasises the specific importance of time in this transcendental approach, arguing that it becomes 'felt in the shot' when we experience 'something significant, truthful going on beyond the events on screen', which makes us conscious that what we can see 'in the frame is not limited to its visual depiction, but is a pointer to something stretching out beyond the frame and to infinity' (Tarkovsky 1986: 117). Thus, Tarkovsky seems less interested in how time impacts on the physical details of the *mise en scène* in the shot than he is in its potential to open up our experience of a more metaphysical dimension in operation beyond visual representation.

Critics have elaborated on these suggestive comments to indicate more precisely the spiritual direction of Tarkovsky's temporal preoccupations in the long take. Petric, for example, argues that 'Tarkovsky emphasises the temporal nature of reality, by means of which he transcends the commonplace signification of objects in order to reach something that the naked eye neglects or is unaccustomed to perceiving' (Petric 1989: 28). Expanding on this issue in relation to the wider historical tradition of interest in this thesis, Beasley-Murray traces the development

from neorealism to what he calls Tarkovsky's 'mystical realism', which 'presents a more apocalyptic view' of the world and is concerned with the theme of 'redemption' (Beasley-Murray 1997: 44). Certainly, when compared with the raw immediacy of films like *Paisà*, there is a strong sense of mysticism in *Stalker* and the nature of the world that it depicts does appear to be particularly apocalyptic.¹⁰ Beasley-Murray observes that Tarkovsky's cinema 'excavates the divine within the banal and the everyday – this is what I term its “mystical realism”' (Beasley-Murray 1997: 48). He insinuates that, by turning away from an emphasis on action to concentrate instead on periods of inaction, privileging the experience of duration in the long take, Tarkovsky uncovers a more extraordinary dimension existing in the otherwise ordinary events. Kovács emphasises this transcendental quality of Tarkovsky's temporal aesthetic in even sharper terms. For Kovács, Tarkovsky draws on his Russian Orthodox tradition to 'evoke the dual vision of the world: simultaneously material and spiritual', and he notes that 'this dualism is clearly manifested in terms of cinematic tools' (Kovács 2007: 187-188). The long take becomes especially important in this approach. Kovács argues that 'the specificity of Tarkovsky's long takes is that he uses time to evoke the existence of a divine universe ... he uses contemplation in time to make the viewer feel the presence of this other world' (Kovács 2007: 393). These comments indicate a general aesthetic principle motivating Tarkovsky's use of the long take in his filmmaking, but we can look in closer detail at how these spiritual concerns arise more specifically in *Stalker*, and how they relate to other details in the film. Moreover, we can also question the extent to which this understanding of Tarkovsky's long take fully accounts for the effect created by the technique in the film. Therefore, this chapter shall now turn to these issues.

¹⁰ In *Paisà*, despite the devastation and brutality of the war-torn environments, Rossellini presents a much more hopeful vision of the characters' situations.

The transcendental qualities of Tarkovsky's long-take style that is often stressed by the filmmaker's commentators are sympathetic to the spiritual themes of *Stalker*'s narrative. The journey through the Zone and the encounter with the room at its centre is supposed to be one of redemption and spiritual rejuvenation for the Professor and the Writer, moving beyond their cynical and disillusioned vision of everyday, sordid reality, which is conveyed through the various discussions that constitute most of the film's action. The extent to which the Stalker's mission is achieved at the end of the journey is questionable, and it seems ultimately to be a failure; neither man enters the room. However, the final 'miracle', when the Stalker's daughter Monkey (Natasha Abramova) moves the glasses across the table telekinetically, does seem to validate the Stalker's endeavours. Throughout the film, the long takes might therefore be seen to work in harmony with the Stalker's mystical vision by emphasising duration in the shot to get beyond the cynical conversations and arguments of the Professor and the Writer. Rather than focusing on this action and making it the defining feature of the scenes, structuring the film around the sensory-motor interactions of the two men, Tarkovsky turns instead to focus on the flow of time in order to discover a more captivating and extraordinary dimension in the scene. As Mroz suggests in her discussion of this feature of Tarkovsky's long takes, 'living through the duration of the film, in this view, puts the spectator in touch with a spiritual sense of time as eternity' (Mroz 2012: 94). In *Stalker*, this perspective is aligned with that of the Stalker, whose mystical vision is opposed to the disbelief and cynicism of the two other travellers.

Furthermore, the long take works stylistically within a framework of religious references in both the dialogue and the images. The film draws on elements of Christian iconography particularly at various points, including, for example, the

biblical passages read by the Stalker's wife and then by the Stalker himself, or the icon of a saint submerged in water among other objects.¹¹ Johnson and Petrie are critical, however, of the specifically Christian emphasis in many critical responses to the film.¹² They argue that despite these references, 'the film tends toward a general framework in which faith, spirituality, and art (none of them seen as exclusively Christian attributes) are set against materialism, cynicism and disbelief', and they point out how these broadly opposing philosophies are 'demarcated in the relationship between Stalker and his two companions' (Johnson and Petrie 1994: 146). The reference to religious iconography in the shots (whether it is geared specifically towards a Christian theology or represents wider spiritual ideals) does not appear to relate to the events in any clear way and might therefore be seen to encourage us to think beyond the actions depicted in the narrative in favour of spiritual reflection. This effect is further enhanced by the duration of the shots, as they linger on the religious details, inviting a deeper sense of contemplation.

The transcendental aspirations of Tarkovsky's long takes do not, however, detract from what is depicted within the shot; we can also focus on how duration relates to the events or objects observed by the camera and the aesthetic results of Tarkovsky's long-take style in a more visible way. Working in a rather different way to the ideas previously discussed, time in the shot helps to pull us into the world depicted on the screen, encouraging us to experience its physical presence and the enigmatic yet captivating qualities of its visual details. As Beasley-Murray suggests, the bodily experience of duration in the long take allows us to 'inhabit' the reality of the film. Bird also points out that 'Tarkovsky's gracefully tracking camera immerses

¹¹ For a more detailed examination of the film's Christian references see Ární Svanur Daníelsson's essay, 'Awake: Faith, Hope and Love in *Stalker*' (Daníelsson 2006: 200-216).

¹² See *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue* (Johnson and Petrie 1994: 143-146).

the viewer in the world of his creation unconditionally' (Bird 2004: 9). This approach particularly stresses an affective and sensory experience of the film, which reflects Mroz's ideas about the more corporeal spectatorial possibilities opened up through duration. And these qualities can be associated directly with Tarkovsky's use of the long take. Refusing analytical editing to emphasise our narrative comprehension of the characters' actions and discussions, the long take provides a more holistic experience of the scenes, which includes the richness of its visual detail; the *mise en scène* is not merely a backdrop to dramatic action but remains just as present to our attention. Furthermore, through their attention to limit-situations, Tarkovsky's long takes tend to exhaust narrative engagement, or at least loosen its dominance, which encourages us to explore the physical qualities of the environment in a more immediately sensory manner.

In contrast to the transcendental focus of Tarkovsky's films, critics have also stressed their notable physicality. Žižek, in particular, argues that Tarkovsky's 'religious obscurantism' is ultimately redeemed by 'his *cinematic materialism*, the direct physical impact of the texture of his films ... What pervades Tarkovsky's films is the heavy gravity of the earth, which seems to exert its pressure on time itself' (Žižek 2001: 102). Writing about Tarkovsky's previous film, *Mirror* (1975), Mroz expands on these notions, observing the strikingly textured qualities of the film's environments. She notes that 'the walls and other surfaces are rarely smooth; covered in protrusions, furrows, and wrinkled grooves, they may evoke a powerful tactile response', and she also suggests that 'the sensory possibilities of filmed textures are developed and elongated as the camera passes slowly over the spaces' (Mroz 2012: 109). These sensory qualities that Tarkovsky develops through the long take in *Mirror* are continued in *Stalker*, becoming evident in the interior locations of the film's early

scenes that take place in the Stalker's apartment and at the bar.¹³ Here, the textural detail of the décor is heightened by the high-contrast sepia photography, which, as Johnson and Petrie point out, make the 'shabbiness and dinginess' of the images 'intensely tactile' (Johnson and Petrie 1994: 153). As the duration of these scenes unfold, we are able to survey the sensory details of the spaces. In the first scene of the film, the camera moves slowly forward, through a darkened hallway towards a set of doors leading into the Stalker's bedroom. Other than the camera itself, there is total stillness in the shot, and through the doors we can only make out some visual details of the décor. Skakov writes that 'this unhurried forward motion creates a sense of embodiment; the filming device draws the viewer into the fabric of *Stalker*' (Skakov 2012: 143). This becomes most apparent once the camera proceeds through the doors to settle in a long shot of the room. The camera holds on this space but there is no activity taking place within it and little sign of life; we are just able to see the figures of the Stalker and his wife lying still in the bed as the faint sound of train horns can be heard from the distance. In this extended period of inaction, it is the environment itself that is most captivating in the shot. The crumbling mortar of the walls and the rough floorboards become incredibly present to us as the shot lingers over these textural details. This is then echoed in the bar scene that follows, in which the décor appears remarkably similar to the Stalker's apartment, with uneven and heavily worn surfaces that surround the characters on all sides. The emphasis on the flow of duration in the long take directs our attention from the developments of the characters' conversations to examine other features in the shot, and this allows the surrounding textures of the space in particular to become more conspicuous and captivating.

¹³ Skakov notes that 'the texture of the wooden floor and the plastered walls in the flat and the bar are clear echoes of *Mirror*' (Skakov 2012: 143).

The immersive quality of Tarkovsky's long takes, and their emphasis on the sensory qualities of environmental textures, is not restricted to the film's interior spaces but becomes even more distinguishable in relation to the outside landscape. Fredric Jameson points out that 'Tarkovsky's screen is notoriously the space in which we once again apprehend or intuit the natural world, or better still its "elements"' (Jameson 1992: 97-98). This becomes pronounced when the film moves into the Zone. In these scenes, the camera places the characters in relation to the surrounding natural landscape and amongst the wreckage that litters it. As Skakov points out, 'the materiality and gravity of the Zone is extremely important ... The Zone and its surroundings are manifestly heavy' (Skakov 2012: 144). Our engagement with the material qualities of the Zone's environment is heightened, most importantly, through the long take and its shift in emphasis from action to duration. This becomes evident when the characters first arrive in the Zone. Framing the men from a distance, the camera does not focus on their conversation but emphasises, instead, their relation to the surrounding landscape. The foreground of the shot is dominated by discarded, rusting metal objects and rotting wooden railway sleepers, which are set amongst dense grass. And behind the characters the wild vegetation continues into the distance, within which there are a few falling telephone poles and burnt out vehicles. As the shot unfolds in time, largely independent from the developments of the discussions, the shot works to distract from the dialogue, which allows us to examine the various textured and coloured details of the mysterious environment. We are not led, however, towards any particular details that might reveal clues about the dramatic nature of the space; the question of what the Zone is, exactly, which the characters are concerned to explore in their conversations, remains ultimately unclear. Instead, the shot stresses the sheer physical properties of the landscape, which encourages us

toward a sensory, rather than an intellectual, awareness of it. The gradual movement of the camera further emphasises this approach to the environment. Rather than directing our attention to particular details it slowly surveys the space, introducing new physical features for our eyes to explore and drawing ever closer to objects in the frame, which reveals the finer textural details of their surfaces.



Fig. 4.5 *Stalker* (1979)

There are also many long takes in the Zone where Tarkovsky turns his camera away from the characters altogether to explore the environment in the absence of action and human presence. As Le Fanu points out, the camera often ‘slides off’ in ‘astonishingly controlled, seemingly endless travelling shots – shots which interrogate nature (earth, moss, bushes, streams, ruins) with an intensity and a duration that has seldom been equalled’ (Le Fanu 1987: 94). In these durations of inaction, Tarkovsky allows time for us to explore the material details of the world depicted in the shot. By

remaining transfixed on such features, devoid of any clear narrative purpose or meaning, the long take stretches these non-events to their limits, which exhausts our intellectual engagement with the image and, as Skakov writes, ‘as a result of this semantic “exhaustion”, it is the texture of objects and natural elements, not their semantics, that is of utmost importance’ (Skakov 2012: 149). This becomes clear, for example, after their arrival, when the Stalker leaves the other two men at the tracks and heads into the Zone alone. The film cuts from the Writer and the Professor waiting for their guide at the end of the railway line, as they are disturbed by the sound of a dog howling in the distance. But the camera does not immediately pick up the Stalker elsewhere in the Zone; instead it reveals an indeterminate space devoid of any figures. The film presents a close-up of rusted metal scraps submerged in the lush grassland. The camera then moves steadily upwards, past the debris, to reveal the bare branches of a tree just above, which are covered in thick, dewy spider webs. As the camera continues its movement the wider landscape is brought into shot, unveiling a clearing in the forest where, in the background, stands a large derelict building that we later discover houses the miraculous room that is the destination of the characters’ journey. At this point, however, it is unclear why we are shown this space and, even looking at the shot in the knowledge of what the building is, it does not reveal any clues that would engage our intellectual assessment of the space. Rather, the shot allows us to examine the strange textural details of the objects depicted in the frame, immersing us into the physical environment just as the Stalker himself is immersed into it in the following shot.

There are several other points during the characters’ journey through the Zone when the camera turns to explore the textures of the environment and the objects that litter it for extended durations, absent of any human action. In one striking example,

Tarkovsky cuts away from the Stalker and the Writer as they disappear into a darkened tunnel, negotiating the supposedly deadly 'trap' known ironically as the 'dry-tunnel' because it is actually a waterfall. On the soundtrack the two men can be heard speaking and splashing through water, but the camera does not follow them. Rather, the film cuts to a close-up of hot, glowing embers sitting on a rocky surface, below which there are pools of bubbling water. The camera then tracks sideways, away from the embers, to reveal a tiled floor under a shallow blanket of water. The shot passes over several objects submerged in the water, such as a syringe, a rusted machine gun and torn, saturated pages from a calendar, before returning to the characters as they emerge from the tunnel and discover the Professor sitting outside, drinking from his thermos. The shot explicitly avoids action by remaining distinct from the characters' movements through the tunnel (though this is still indicated through the sound), and it focuses instead on the inanimate but texturally rich objects scattered along the floor. In the following episode, when the characters halt their journey to rest beside a river, there are several more tracking shots that survey the space and objects that surround them. In moments such as these, when the camera turns away from character and action to focus on the non-human forms of the natural environment and the discarded objects within it, the durational emphasis of the long take encourages a more sensory engagement with the image, privileging the material textures of objects over any dramatic meanings they may impart. This in turn also reflects back onto our awareness of time. Skakov observes that 'the spatial decrepitude has temporal implications: the passage of time in *Stalker* reveals itself through the space of the Zone, which is immersed in the process of decay' (Skakov 2012: 144). Thus, as our experience of time in the long take leads to a greater sensory

recognition of material textures in the environment, so these textures themselves display the effects of duration in spatial terms.

But it is not only the textures of the film's environments that Tarkovsky's long takes draw our attention to through their elongated duration. The characters themselves are observed with a similar sensory emphasis. Their bodies not only work to engage our attention through dramatic performance but, even more so, in the very textured details of their surfaces: the wrinkled and stubbly skin, thinning or shaven hair and scruffy attire. Their faces, in particular, become a source of interest for Tarkovsky throughout the film. Le Fanu points out that 'Tarkovsky commands the camera to look at Kaidanovsky (Stalker) not as though he were an actor declaiming portentous lines, but as though he were, somehow, a landscape: unique, weathered, sculpted and natural' (Le Fanu 1987: 97-98). This is also the case for the Professor and the Writer, whose physiological features are equally scrutinised by the camera in lengthy close-ups. As with the surrounding environments in the film, these facial 'landscapes' reflect back onto the experience of duration that becomes pointed in the long take. If, for Deleuze, time is revealed in the body through 'tiredness' and 'waiting', for Tarkovsky, it is also manifested through its textured surfaces; the film stresses the wrinkled, balding features of these middle-aged men, revealing the impact of passing time on their bodies.

Tarkovsky's concern with the textures of his characters' faces becomes most pronounced in the flatcar scene. These details are stressed spatially in the shots by focusing exclusively on the faces in close-ups against a blurred background. The sepia photography further accentuates the details of lines and textures in the frame. But the temporality of the shots is also particularly significant in directing our attention towards a sensory engagement with the appearance of the characters. As action and

movement are reduced almost to the point of their total eradication, our intellectual engagement with the events is also exhausted. The men simply sit on the flatcar, doing nothing, merely waiting to arrive at their destination, experiencing the duration required to get from the border to the end of the railway line inside the Zone. Their faces are therefore no longer sites of dramatic performance or narrative information and, instead, become captivating in their sheer physical detail. The camera lingers in these close-ups of their inactive expressions, allowing us time to explore the rich textural qualities that fill the space of the screen. The rugged appearance of the three men becomes palpable in the scene as we focus on their unshaven and wrinkled skin, as well as the Writer's thinning hair and the Stalker's shaven head. And the physical degradation of the characters' features testifies to the force of time that Tarkovsky is keen to uncover and to stress in this lengthy period of inaction.

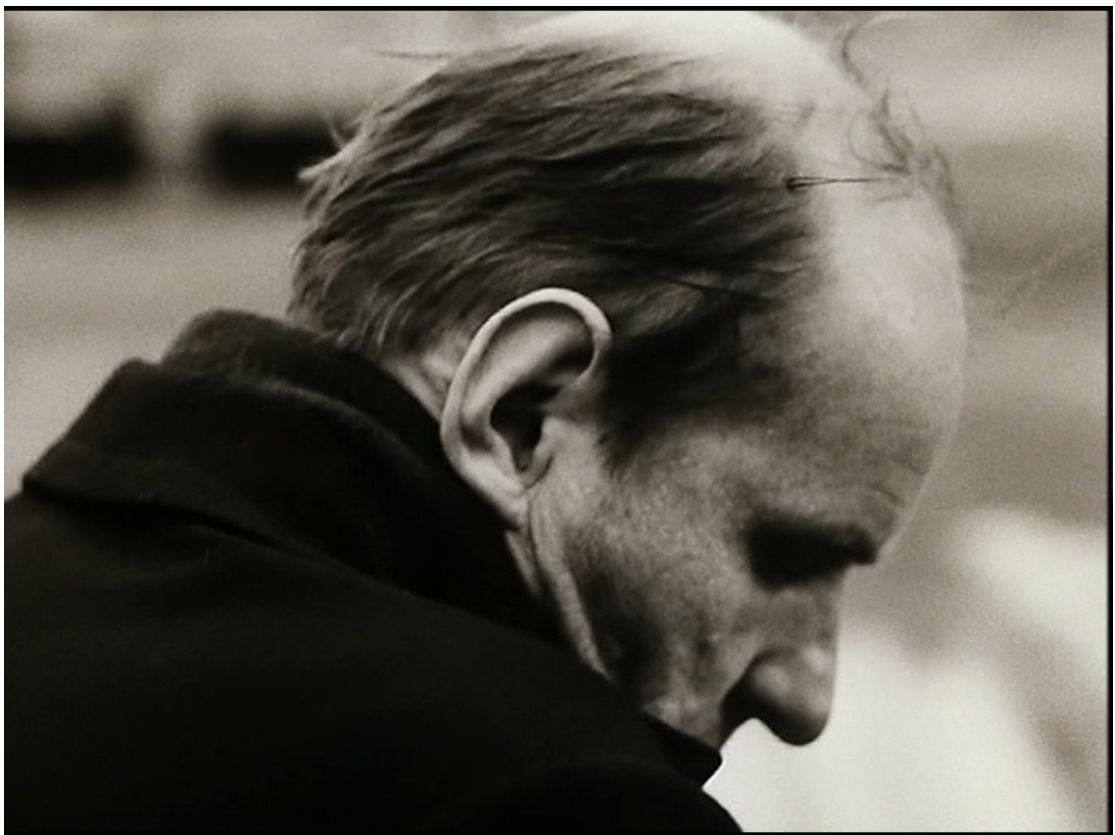


Fig. 4.6 *Stalker* (1979)

The way that the long take acts to immerse the spectator into the physical world of the film through time appears to refute the notions of transcendence and spiritual discovery that many critics have associated with Tarkovsky's use of the technique. Rather than encouraging us to look beyond the visual features of the shot in order to grasp a sense of an unseeable spiritual dimension, the long takes instead bring us closer to the physical matter of the world, allowing a direct and holistic experience of texture and material in the frame, which includes not only our intellectual understanding but appeals, also, to a more sensory engagement. But this does not necessarily mark a denial of the spiritual element that is keenly associated with Tarkovsky's cinema. Žižek argues that, rather than incompatible opposing dimensions, mysticism and materiality are inseparable in Tarkovsky's filmmaking. He suggests that Tarkovsky develops 'an attitude of *materialist theology*, of a deep spiritual stance which draws its strength from its very abandonment of intellect and its immersion into material reality' (Žižek 2001: 103). Žižek points out that where ordinarily 'the approach to spirit is perceived as elevation, as a getting rid of the burden of weight, of gravitational force which binds us to earth, as cutting links with material inertia and starting to "float freely"', in Tarkovsky's cinema 'we enter the spiritual dimension only via intense direct physical contact with the damp heaviness of earth' (Žižek 2001: 103). Thus, following these observations, the spiritual dimension of the long take might be seen not as a means of transcendence from the events and objects it depicts, but in the very material immersion that it creates.

The relations between spiritual and physical experience that Žižek identifies becomes a central part of *Stalker's* narrative. When the characters arrive in the Zone the Stalker firstly heads off alone into the woods to lie down in the thick shrubbery, to immerse himself into the landscape. Then, as the three men negotiate their way

through the environment, they are lead through pools of water, across overgrown grassland and down muddy tracks. Frequently, they stop to sit or lie down directly on these natural surfaces, and by putting his two travellers into physical contact with the environment it seems that the Stalker hopes to unlock their faith. The spiritual ambitions of the film's long takes might therefore be seen along the same lines, aiming to immerse us into the physical world of the film as a means to reveal a more mystical dimension. This immersive aesthetic, whether it succeeds in revealing any spiritual qualities in the film's material textures or renders them in their practical reality, is ultimately achieved in *Stalker* through the temporal focus of the long take.

CHAPTER FIVE:

NARRATIVE, STAGING AND DEDRAMATISATION

‘A European filmmaker starting out in the late 1960s confronted a rich array of stylistic options. One of the major choices was this: to utilize the long take or not?’ (David Bordwell 2005: 149)

This chapter will focus on the narrative implications of the long take with an emphasis on the observations of the American film scholar David Bordwell. Bordwell’s writing on film style since the 1980s has become particularly influential on studies of film style, especially in relation to narrative. His work has also become representative of a perceptual-cognitive approach to cinema, which is dedicated to understanding how films shape our comprehension of narrative through the communication of visual and aural information.¹ Bordwell has examined these ideas in relation to various periods of film history and the work of individual filmmakers more specifically. My interest in this chapter, however, will be focused on Bordwell’s arguments about the period of interest in this thesis, considering the relationship between the broad narrative patterns that Bordwell identifies and how these emerge through the long take. Furthermore, the chapter will look closely at what Bordwell suggests about the long take more specifically in modern European cinema, and how his arguments both relate to and differ from the ideas of Bazin and Deleuze that were considered in the previous chapters of this thesis. Despite clear differences in their approaches to the long take, there are also some significant overlaps between these theorists, which will become apparent when considering the issues surrounding narrative and dedramatisation.

¹ For an outline of this methodology see Bordwell’s chapter on ‘The Viewer’s Activity’ in *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Bordwell 1985: 29-47).

Space, Time and Narrative

One of Brian Henderson's main criticisms of Bazin in *A Critique of Film Theory* is what he sees as Bazin's failure to account for the wider structures that shape film style. He argues that 'Bazin's is a one-stage film theory ... for in Bazin, film art is complete, is fully achieved in the shot itself' (Henderson 1980: 27). Henderson suggests that because he 'does not get beyond the shot (which may also be a sequence) ... Bazin has no sense (and certainly no doctrine) of the overall formal organization of films' (Henderson 1980: 27). Henderson's emphasis on 'the overall formal organization' seems to point especially to the issue of narrative, the way that the events are presented and ordered to make up the complete film as a self-contained fiction. Bazin does not so much neglect this issue in his discussions of Welles and Rossellini, as Henderson implies, but rather, he sees their use of the long take as a break from the narrative organisation of the events. For Bazin, analytical editing epitomises the organisation of scenes according to the demands of plot development. The long take moves beyond this narrative focus to encompass the space and action of the scene as a whole, including those details that are superfluous to the plot. This marks, for Bazin, a shift away from cinema's ability to present a narrative through its images, or rather, its exclusive use for this purpose, to focus on its more immediate photographic properties, its way of capturing events and allowing us to experience these events as we do in the world. In Bazin's thinking, the overall narrative structure in neorealism is the resultant accumulation of 'facts', rather than the pre-existing structure that determines the shape of these elements. He writes: 'for Rossellini, facts take on a meaning, but not like a tool whose function has predetermined its form. The facts follow one another, and the mind is forced to observe their resemblance' (Bazin 1971: 36). For Bazin, the realism of the long take is in part defined by its refusal of

the abstractions ordinarily imposed by the narrative on the film's direct presentation of events. Deleuze's understanding of the shift from the cinema of the 'movement-image' to the cinema of the 'time-image' in neorealism reflects a similar move away from the exclusive organisation of images according to the developments of narrative action to an emphasis, instead, on the unfolding duration that is undetermined by these movements. For Deleuze this leads to new operations of thought and the emergence of concepts that are no longer tied into the movement and action of the plot.

Bordwell considers the tradition of long-take filmmaking in post-war Europe that has so far been examined through the framework of Bazin's and Deleuze's thought. But he approaches this phenomenon from a different perspective to these critics. Bazin and Deleuze both stress the ontological qualities of the long take in these films, considering how the technique achieves cinema's inherent potential to render events in their integral duration. As Beasley-Murray writes: 'for both Deleuze and Bazin, the specificity of the cinema remains its unfolding of the image in the real time that becomes the lived time of thought and the body' (Beasley-Murray 1997: 39). Bordwell provides an alternative approach to the long take and its resultant aesthetic effects by turning instead to questions of narrative. Rather than focusing on the photographic basis of the shot, he is interested in how film style shapes the presentation of the story and our comprehension of it, which follows from his perceptual and cognitive critical methodology. In his study, *Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging* (2005), Bordwell writes: 'I grant that recording reality is one important function of cinema', but regardless of its photographic basis, Bordwell is concerned with how the film image 'offers traces that activate our eyes and mind. It yields spools and trajectories, and we viewers pursue them, guided by their

patterning, their context, and our sense of what is likely to be significant' (Bordwell 2005: 238). Thus, the ways that the image works to guide our attention to details in the frame, and how this shapes the construction of the narrative in our minds, is what Bordwell argues is most important.² He states that, first and foremost, film style 'serves to *denote* a fictional or nonfictional realm of actions, agents, and circumstances' (Bordwell 2005: 33). This 'denotative' function of the film is, for Bordwell, determined by the same basic features of the cinematic image that are of interest to Bazin and Deleuze in their discussions, but he sees these in a different light to the previous critics.

In his earlier influential study, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985), Bordwell observes that space and time in fictional cinema become distinct features of narrative communication. He argues that these defining aspects of the film image are structured in ways that shape our comprehension of the story by creating certain narrational effects. Rather than stressing the extent to which filmmakers maintain or fragment the physical relations of the *mise en scène*, and the resultant spatial and perceptual realism, Bordwell considers how the treatment of space 'cues' spectators to developments in the plot, revealing or subduing salient narrative information. These spatial 'cues' are created through various stylistic features within the shot, through the editing and the sound, and suggestions that are made about the imagined off-screen space of the fictional world beyond the frame.³ Bordwell also observes that the narrational process develops through the handling of time, examining how temporality shapes the development of the narrative and our access to it. Rather than conceptualising cinematic time along Bergsonian lines, as experienced duration, Bordwell argues that there are, in fact, different levels of time represented in the

² See *Figures Traced in Light* (Bordwell 2005: 35-40).

³ See *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Bordwell 1985: 113-120).

fiction film: that of the events constituting the story, that of the narration's presentation of these events, and the immediate screen time of the film's stylistic presentation of action. The interactions between these different layers of temporality shape the development of the narrative and our access to it.⁴ The long take, conceived along these lines, becomes significant in the way that it structures space and time in relation to the film's depiction of the story. These ideas are not without their limitations. Mroz points out, for example, that Bordwell's writing 'does not contribute enough to an understanding of the aesthetics, affect, concept and operation of duration' (Mroz 2012: 24). This will become apparent in my later discussion of Angelopoulos's use of the long take in *The Travelling Players* near the end of this chapter. Nonetheless, Bordwell's ideas do offer another framework for considering how the long take might work in modern European cinema, and they also help to bring to light some of the narrative implications that are implicitly present in Bazin's and Deleuze's more ontologically focused observations on the technique. In this chapter, I shall therefore put these differing theories of the technique into dialogue in the attempt to come to a fuller understanding of the long take, which encompasses both its immediately photographic and wider narrative dimensions.

Narration and Staging

In *Narration in the Fiction Film*, Bordwell identifies a tradition of 'art-cinema narration', predominantly operating in Europe from the 1950s to the 1970s, which is defined in opposition to the classical narration of Hollywood and other popular Western cinemas.⁵ For Bordwell, as for Bazin and Deleuze, neorealism marks the

⁴ See *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Bordwell 1985: 77-84).

⁵ Bordwell's chapter on 'art-cinema narration' largely expands on his influential 1979 essay 'The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice' (Bordwell 1979: 56-63).

historical break, and he sees that films such as *Paisà*, *Bicycle Thieves* and *Umberto D* represent ‘a transitional phenomenon’, moving away from the conventions of classical narration to establish ‘founding conventions of objective verisimilitude’ in film narrative during this period (Bordwell 1985: 230). He suggests that a tradition of ‘art-cinema narration’ came to be established by the early 1950s, which filmmakers would continue to practice throughout the following decades.

Following the model of neorealism, a defining feature of ‘art-cinema narration’ is realism, where the film aims to present the events in an objective and undramatic way. Bordwell states: ‘in the name of verisimilitude, the tight causality of classical Hollywood construction is replaced by a more tenuous linking of events’, and Bordwell points out, in particular, that ‘the mise-en-scène may emphasize verisimilitude of behaviour as well as verisimilitude of space ... or time’ (Bordwell 1985: 206). This includes an emphasis on spatial and temporal unity through the use of the long take and deep focus, which contrasts with the dramatic structuring of space and time in classical narration. These ideas are reminiscent of Bazin’s previous arguments about the objective rendering of the reality continuum in neorealism, and Bordwell cites Bazin’s emphasis on these stylistic features in relation to his own observations on the objective realism of ‘art-cinema narration’.⁶ However, Bordwell considers this turn to objective realism not so much in relation to ontological authenticity, but rather as a narrative effect created through certain stylistic choices. Bordwell suggests that ‘the realism of the art cinema is no more “real” than that of the classical film; it is simply a different canon of realistic motivation, a new *vraisemblance*, justifying particular compositional options and effects’ (Bordwell 1985: 206). These options are geared towards a different narrative ‘mode’, which

⁶ See *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Bordwell 1985: 206).

involves ‘an open-ended approach to causality in general’ (Bordwell 1985: 207). This involves, in particular, ‘a more tenuous linking of events’ that ‘loosens up cause and effect’, where frequently ‘scenes are built around chance encounters’ or the characters’ ‘aimless wanderings’, which lack the closure of ‘explicit deadlines’ (Bordwell 1985: 206-207). But where Bazin sees such openness as a greater respect for the wholeness of events, or where Deleuze recognises the emergence of a direct presentation of time, Bordwell argues that, ‘while motivated as “objectively” realistic, this open-endedness is no less a formal effect than is the more tightly “economical” Hollywood dramaturgy’ (Bordwell 1985: 207). It is an effect that determines the way narrative information is communicated to the viewer, one that opposes the principles of strong causal connections that underpin narration in the classical film.⁷

The tight causality of classical narration that Bordwell observes is intrinsically related to the use of analytical editing in these films. This is demonstrated in the example of *The Maltese Falcon*, where Spade’s investigation becomes a clear line of progress; the discovery of one piece of information provokes him to move forward to uncover another and so on. The editing between and within the scenes is geared towards presenting this clear teleological development. It works to present the actions efficiently and stresses the connections between them, showing dialogue or behavioural details directly followed by further actions in response. Bordwell, together with Kristin Thompson, identify this causal emphasis in the editing of *The Maltese Falcon*, noting that ‘throughout, the shots present space to emphasize the cause-and-effect flow – the characters’ actions, entrances, dialogues, reactions. The editing has economically organized space to convey narrative continuity’ (Bordwell and Thompson 1996: 292). William Luhr also reflects these comments in his

⁷ For Bordwell’s discussion of classical causality see *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Bordwell 1985: 162).

discussion of the film, writing that ‘the individual shots are stitched together according to the highly coded principles of classic continuity editing that emphasize clarity of action and story continuity’ (Luhr 1996: 162). The cutting leads us directly from action to reaction in order to maintain strict narrative continuity, for example, when Cairo reveals significant information about the ornamental bird in the office scene, which then motivates the subsequent development of the plot from this point onwards. Bordwell and Thompson point out that ‘Huston could have played the entire conversation in one long take ... Why has he broken the conversation into seven shots?’ (Bordwell and Thompson 1996: 293). They indicate that the editing works to direct our attention ‘at exactly the moment Huston wants us to’, and they suggest that ‘in the long take and more distant framing, Huston would have to channel our attention in other ways, perhaps through composition or sound’ (Bordwell and Thompson 1996: 293). Where analytical editing directs us from one significant narrative action to the next to create a causal chain, the long take does not possess such strict control. Though the writers point to other ways the long take might establish some sense of causal development, what becomes clear is the technique’s essentially objective presentation of the action that provokes a more tenuous impression of narrative causality and an open-endedness in the action. These qualities are, for Bordwell, central to the ‘art-cinema narration’ that marks the work of post-war European filmmakers.

Bordwell indicates that ambiguity also becomes a central feature of ‘art-cinema narration’, but he does not share Bazin’s idea that such ambiguity marks the film’s fidelity to the phenomenological conditions of reality; it is, instead, a narrative strategy that filmmakers may employ to obscure story information. Bordwell argues that the uncertainty provoked by these films ‘is evidently an effect of the narration,

which can play down characters' causal projects, keep silent about their motives, emphasize "insignificant" actions and intervals, and never reveal effects of actions' (Bordwell 1985: 207). Seen in this light, the long take might therefore be understood as a technique used consciously to obscure narrative information by refusing to focus on significant details and to link these details through editing. Instead, the narrative is made more ambiguous by including everything within a scene that is not important to the plot, and by making the spectator search for relevant story information. Under the terms of Bordwell's theory, therefore, perceptual freedom in the long take is not so much defined as a move away from the narrative organisation of a scene (and its resultant abstractions) to experience the 'existential density' of the events and their setting; rather, it is a different type of narrative organisation, one that makes the ambiguity of the events central to its narrational operation.

But Bordwell observes that these realist features of the narrative are also met with a pattern of 'overt narrational "commentary"', whereby 'the narrational act interrupts the transmission of fabula information and highlights its own role' (Bordwell 1985: 209). This relates to the dialectic between photographic realism and formal abstraction that has been observed in the films of Antonioni, Akerman and Tarkovsky discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis. But for Bordwell, this tension is understood specifically in relation to narrative structure. He notes that 'stylistic devices that gain prominence with respect to classical norms', which includes unusual angles, stressed cutting (or its absence) and conspicuous camera movements 'can be taken as the narration's commentary', and he concludes that 'the marked self-consciousness of art-cinema narration creates both a coherent fabula world and an intermittently present but highly noticeable external authority through which we gain access to it' (Bordwell 1985: 209). Bordwell therefore stresses that

these films emphasise both an objective presentation of the story, while also calling attention to the camera's position in relation to the events, stressing the perspective from which the narrative is depicted. These characteristics of objective 'verisimilitude', tenuous causality and open-endedness, ambiguity and 'overt commentary', Bordwell argues, amount to a set of conventions that differ from those of classical Hollywood, constituting an alternative mode of narration, which becomes conspicuous in post-war European cinema.

Bordwell's concern with the narrative effects of 'art-cinema narration' differs from the emphasis on photographic realism and temporality that forms the basis of Bazin's and Deleuze's enquiries into modern European cinema. However, Bordwell's ideas do help to bring to light some of the implicit narrative implications within the previous critics' discussions. Firstly, as Bordwell's citations of Bazin suggest, there are notable overlaps between their theories, which reveal a common recognition of the alternative approach to storytelling fostered in the long take. In his study of cinematic narration, George M. Wilson stresses this point more clearly, casting Bazin's observations on the long take specifically along narrative lines. He sees Bazin's emphasis on wholeness, perceptual freedom and ambiguity as a form of 'nonomniscient' narration.⁸ Wilson summarises this idea, writing: 'the alternative style that Bazin envisages would respect the continuity and complexity of the spatio-temporal integration of a field of action while being willing to leave the causal and psychological/teleological integration of the action less articulated' (Wilson 1986: 90-91). This chimes with the narrative features that Bordwell identifies, especially the open-endedness and ambiguity of events that results from an objective

⁸ See *Narration in Light: Studies in Cinematic Point of View* (Wilson 1986: 89-94).

‘verisimilitude’ of space and time, revealing how Bazin’s ideas on cinematic realism carry significant narrative effects.

Furthermore, these implications can also be seen in Deleuze’s discussion about the shift from the ‘movement-image’ to the ‘time-image’. The notable overlap between Deleuze’s and Bordwell’s observations on modern European cinema is something that has been largely overlooked in film theory, most likely due to their very different critical languages and traditions, and opposing methodologies.⁹ But despite speaking of these films in seemingly incompatible ways, there are some important similarities, especially in relation to narrative. Kovács, in his assessment of Deleuze’s film history, suggests that the breakdown of the sensory-motor situations of classical cinema ‘does not imply that narrative is no longer possible, nor that there are no longer any “narratable stories” ... the narrative principles in modern cinema are different from those in classical cinema’ (Kovács 2000: 163). We can see how the characteristics Deleuze identifies with the crisis of action have significant narrative ramifications: the move away from ‘globalising’ and ‘synthetic’ situations to ‘dispersive’ ones, the ‘deliberately weak’ linkages where chance becomes predominant, the aimless ‘modern voyage’ of the characters.¹⁰ These characteristics overlap with the features of tenuous causality, open-endedness and ambiguity that, for Bordwell, define ‘art-cinema narration’. The similarities between the three main theorists examined in this thesis can also be observed by considering a familiar example.

In chapter one we saw how Rossellini, in the Florence episode of *Paisà*, establishes a realist aesthetic that Bazin sees as neorealism’s defining quality,

⁹ Both theorists have attracted their own groups of dedicated critics within film studies, and these two traditions – Deleuzian film-philosophy and Bordwellian/Wisconsin formalism – are rarely placed in relation to each other.

¹⁰ See *Cinema 1* (Deleuze 1986: 207-208).

emphasising the wholeness of the events through the long take and refusing to employ editing to abstract the ‘existential density’ of the reality presented in the film. In chapter three, we saw that through these same qualities the episode also demonstrates the crisis of action and the breakdown of sensory-motor situations that, for Deleuze, marks neorealism’s historical break from classical to modern cinema. Examining these ideas from a different perspective, we can further observe that the episode reflects the features that Bordwell identifies in his discussion of ‘art-cinema narration’, which, for him, marks neorealism’s development of an alternative narrative form, distinct from the conventions of classical narration. Throughout the episode, Rossellini stresses the ‘objective verisimilitude’ of the events in his use of the long take and deep focus, refusing to dramatically emphasise actions and details through close-ups and cutting, for instance, in the long shot that introduces Harriet amongst the multitude of action in the first scene. This approach also establishes a notably tenuous causal development in the narrative, with a greater degree of open-endedness and ambiguity in the story, for example, in the various encounters that appear to distract from the protagonists’ journey, rather than moving it forward.

Bordwell’s ideas about narrative have greatly influenced subsequent studies of modern European cinema. Betz, for example, indicates that Bordwell’s essay (and subsequent chapter) on art cinema has been particularly important in shaping scholarship on post-war European cinema since the 1980s, including his own study.¹¹ For Kovács, also, narrative becomes the starting point of his extensive study of the period in *Screening Modernism*, and he echoes Bordwell’s sentiments about an alternative narrative form established in modern cinema. Kovács insists that ‘modern art cinema is essentially narrative, but its narrative forms are based on interactions

¹¹ See *Beyond the Subtitle: Remapping European Art Cinema* (Betz 2009: 10-15).

unknown or rarely apparent in classical art cinema' (Kovács 2007: 57). He then goes on to outline the formal features that Bordwell identifies in his earlier book and expands several of these ideas further.¹² In particular, Kovács points out the loosening of teleological progression, the greater emphasis on chance developments and an increased ambiguity surrounding story events. He concludes that 'the function of these traits is to create a *complex signifying structure* in which the viewer's attention is diverted from the direct cause-and-effect chain of the plot toward information that is only indirectly related or unrelated to causality' (Kovács 2007: 62). These observations further point to the significant narrative impact of stylistic techniques such as the long take and, for Kovács, 'radical continuity' during this period is defined in relation to narrative as much as to what he calls the 'audiovisual texture' of the film, or in other words, its photographic dimension.

Bordwell himself builds on his earlier arguments in *Figures Traced in Light*. Here, Bordwell turns his attention to the practice of cinematic staging and pictorial composition, looking more specifically at the long take.¹³ He traces the tradition of long-take filmmaking in post-war Europe that first emerged with neorealism, before coming to maturity with Antonioni and the filmmakers who followed in his wake through the 1960s and 1970s, which is also the interest of this thesis.¹⁴ Bordwell aligns this historical survey with his previous ideas about 'art-cinema narration', arguing that the long take becomes conspicuous in this period due to its dedramatisation of the narrative. He writes:

Between neorealism, with its gap-filled narratives and unexpected longueurs, and the blank surfaces and diminuendo pacing of *L'Avventura*, filmic storytelling changed significantly. Dramas began

¹² See *Screening Modernism* (Kovács 2007: 56-81).

¹³ Bordwell's focus in this book follows from his examination of composition and staging in depth, and their perceptual effects, in his earlier study *On the History of Film Style* (1997).

¹⁴ See *Figures Traced in Light* (Bordwell 2005: 149-159).

excising “melodrama,” moving closer to the spacious rhythms of the modern novel. Emotions were underplayed, even suppressed. (Bordwell 2005: 152)

Bordwell suggests that the long take works in several ways to promote dedramatisation and these relate closely to the features of the technique identified by Bazin and Deleuze. In particular, Bordwell points to the qualities of spatial and temporal integrity and the emphasis on time in the long take. But he understands these features along different lines to the previous critics, stressing how they work to de-emphasise the presentation and development of dramatic events within the shot.

Most generally, Bordwell argues that by refusing the dramatic emphasis of analytical editing, the long take allows these filmmakers to ‘maintain a sense of muted drama’ and to ‘alert the spectator to the nuances that were replacing histrionics’ (Bordwell 2005: 153). Rather than providing close views of significant details in different shots, the long take retains all the action as a whole, often placing centres of dramatic interest at a distance. He notes that the long take involves ‘the simultaneous presence of many elements in the visual field, soliciting the viewer to search out revealing aspects’ (Bordwell 2005: 160). The effect of dedramatisation that Bordwell identifies in the long take is thus achieved firstly through a weakening and suppression of narrative communication and a sense of emotional distance that reflects the visual distance maintained in the shot.

The integrity of space in the long take provides options for how the action can be staged within it, and Bordwell observes that the distant shot is also coupled with certain ‘image schemas’ that further dedramatise the events. The first of these Bordwell calls ‘recessive’, where action is staged across several planes stretching into the depth of the shot. This obscures dramatic details by pushing them into the background of the frame, rather than clarifying these details with closer views, and

makes landscapes or architecture more prominent.¹⁵ Where the camera would traditionally focus on locations of dramatic interest, namely the human face and body, or particular props, ‘recessive’ staging in the long take allows other elements of the *mise en scène*, such as environmental details or background action, to become equally present to the viewer’s attention. This becomes a distinct quality that defines the long take in *Paisà*, *Cronaca di un amore* and *Stalker*, which all place the characters into the depth of the shot to make environment a distinct feature of our perception. But alternatively, Bordwell suggests, the long take might be coupled with ‘planimetric’ staging: ‘a less volumetric, more self-consciously “modernist” image – flatter, obviously constructed, sometimes posing disconcerting optical puzzles’ (Bordwell 2005: 167). This staging method encourages the viewer to focus on the formal design and composition of the shot in a similar manner to abstract painting.¹⁶ This approach becomes evident at certain moments in *Cronaca di un amore* and throughout *Jeanne Dielman*, where geometric framing is stressed within the long take, drawing attention to the camera’s presence and its perspective on the events. Although they work in opposing ways, Bordwell argues that both ‘recessive’ and ‘planimetric’ staging in the long take dedramatise the narrative by countering more organic, drama-centred methods associated with classical editing. These schemas introduce other features into the image for our attention, notably landscape or pictorial design, which attenuate the dramatic construction.

Bordwell’s attention to how the events are shaped visually in the shot, particularly along the lines of the two staging practices favouring ‘recessive’ and ‘planimetric’ composition, appears to contradict Bazin’s emphasis on realism. Rather

¹⁵ See *Figures Traced in Light* (Bordwell 2005: 167).

¹⁶ Bordwell takes his concepts of ‘recessive’ and ‘planimetric’ staging from the art historian Heinrich Wölfflin’s 1950 study *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art*. See *Figures Traced in Light* (Bordwell 2005: 167-168, 289).

than capturing a self-contained reality existing within the shot, Bordwell draws attention to the idea that this space is, in fact, a construct. Events may not be manipulated through editing, but such manipulation is still present via other stylistic means, notably through the arrangement of figures and environment within the space of the shot. The process of staging is an undeniable feature of fiction film production; because the events do not exist in pro-filmic reality, they must be created for the camera to then record them. Yet, by staging and filming a scene in a single continuous take, what the filmmaker produces in the film is a block of physical reality (albeit a fictional one), where relations of space and time are maintained in their concrete existence.¹⁷ An awareness of the arrangement of the action therefore does not invalidate the photographic realism of the long take that Bazin champions. Indeed, Bazin concludes 'The Evolution of the Language of Cinema' by recognising that 'the image – its plastic composition and the way it is set in time, because it is founded on a much higher degree of realism – has at its disposal more means of manipulating reality and modifying it from within' (Bazin 1967: 40). It is this manipulation and modification of the events 'from within' that Bordwell highlights in his discussion of staging and composition. However, these stylistic features, while maintaining the spatio-temporal wholeness of the action that forms the basis of Bazin's photographic realism, can also draw our attention to film form, to the presence of the camera in relation to the events depicted in the shot; this is especially prominent in Bordwell's observations on 'planimetric' composition. Thus, the dialectic between realism and formal abstraction that we have observed throughout this thesis is reflected in the

¹⁷ This point returns to the problem of direct realism verses the phenomenological understanding of realism that was discussed in chapter one. As Morgan suggests in his assessment of Bazin, it is the latter conception that provides a greater understanding of realism in the long take. See 'Rethinking Bazin' (Morgan 2006: 454-458).

staging practices that Bordwell identifies, and in their subsequent promotion of dedramatisation.

Bordwell argues that the long take also promotes dedramatisation through its handling of time. He follows Bazin and Deleuze by recognising that temporality becomes a prominent issue in the long take, but Bordwell's emphasis differs from the previous critics. Rather than drawing attention to the way that the long take provides a direct experience of duration, he stresses that the technique disrupts the development of narrative time. Bordwell writes: 'filmmakers began wedging in *temps morts*, the "dead time" between dramatic arcs ... and the sustained shot could force the viewer to concentrate on the empty intervals that filled so many scenes' (Bordwell 2005: 153). The long take introduces moments of 'dead time' in the narrative because it does not remove the pauses and inaction that would be cut out by classical editing in favour of a more concise dramatic pacing.¹⁸ Insignificant actions, such as the mere wandering of the characters, or sheer stasis and emptiness, become the focus of the viewer's attention for protracted periods, distracting from the developments of the plot. The long take's treatment of narrative time thus marks a further attenuation of the drama.

Bordwell's notions about 'dead time' reflect a more widely popular conception of temporality in modern European cinema.¹⁹ Like Bordwell, other critics consider the treatment of time in these films specifically in relation to narrative. Kovács, for example, notes that the 'radical continuity' of the long take involves 'extensive representation of scenes where "nothing happens," in other words *temps morts* or in Antonioni's phrasing, the time preceding or following action' (Kovács

¹⁸ In *Narration in the Fiction Film* Bordwell writes: 'we should not underestimate the role of rapid rhythm in the classical film; more than one practitioner has stressed the need to move the construction of story action along so quickly that the audience has no time to reflect – or get bored' (Bordwell 1985: 165).

¹⁹ Bordwell already refers to 'the *temps mort* in a conversation' as part of the temporal 'verisimilitude' of 'art-cinema narration' (Bordwell 1985: 206).

2007: 128). Furthermore, Betz also notes that, most often, ‘the sum produced by adding the variables “time” and “art film” is “slow”’, observing that ‘as plot winds down and character motivation becomes null, the so-called dead time (*temps mort*) and apparently empty narrative spaces of art cinema may create discomfort for viewers’ that, he suggests, are ‘accustomed to clearly motivated action or dialogue or movement’ (Betz 2009: 4-5). The idea of ‘dead time’ has been associated especially with Antonioni’s films, and his commentators frequently repeat the term as one of the defining formal features of his work. Rohdie, for example, notes that ‘shots of this kind, of a dead time, or which are non-functional narratively, are frequent in Antonioni’s films and already present in *Cronaca*’ (Rohdie 1990: 50). Discussing *L’avventura*, Brunette also states that ‘Antonioni was directly following the lead of his predecessor, Roberto Rossellini, who ... had begun experimenting with cinematic “dead time” as part of his exploration of a realist aesthetic’ (Brunette 1998: 29). Chatman, moreover, dedicates a section of his chapter on Antonioni’s cinematic form to ‘the new montage and *temps mort*’.²⁰ And he argues that ‘*temps mort* is perhaps the most characteristic of Antonioni’s stylistic effects ... Antonioni fixes or “kills” time on backgrounds that he finds compositionally interesting’ (Chatman 1985: 126). More recent criticism on Antonioni continues to stress the centrality of ‘dead time’ in his filmmaking.²¹ And for Kovács, the filmmakers that follow Antonioni’s model of ‘radical continuity’ also ‘make excessive use of ... the predominance of *temps mort* in the narrative’ (Kovács 2007: 156). Bordwell’s notion about time in the long take and its dedramatisation of the narrative is therefore situated within a matrix of similar critical reflections on temporality in modern European cinema.

²⁰ See *Antonioni* (Chatman 1985: 125-131).

²¹ See, for example, Rascaroli and Rhodes’s discussion of ‘dead time’ in their introductory chapter to *Antonioni: Centenary Essays* (Rascaroli and Rhodes 2011: 9-10).

The idea of ‘dead time’ in the long take that Bordwell and other critics raise reflects the narrative implications of Bazin’s and, especially, Deleuze’s observations on duration. Where these critics stress the turn to experienced, lived time over its determination by narrative action, this inevitably impacts on the narrative that remains in the film. By the same token, ‘dead time’ does not mean the absence of time itself, and a return to the stasis of the photograph. Hamish Ford points out that ‘the “dead time” description is in at least one sense misleading. It is not time, or space, which is dead; these violent primordial forces are never more *alive* and devastating than at such moments’ (Ford 2003). The ontological observations of Bazin and Deleuze show that time, felt duration, is an inherent feature of the cinematic image, and as Ford suggests, this becomes most apparent in moments of ‘dead time’, when the absence of action means that duration becomes most perceptible in the shot. Thus, ‘dead time’ is closely related to the ‘time-image’; it is, in fact, the other side of the same aesthetic phenomenon. The purely optical and sound situations, the idle periods and limit-situations, which for Deleuze allow the direct presentation of time to emerge in modern cinema also bring narrative action and plot to a halt. As Rascaroli and Rhodes write: ‘in these dead moments “nothing happens”. Time passes, but only passes, which is what makes it dead. The sheer passage of time in the film seems to mark or materialise time as time’ (Rascaroli and Rhodes 2011: 10). It is this emphasis on time as pure duration rather than the vehicle for dramatic action that, for Bordwell, becomes a crucial factor of dedramatisation in the long take.

The combination of distant framing, staging strategies and ‘dead time’ that Bordwell observes in the long take promotes a dedramatised narration where the viewer must become more attentive to minor details in order to comprehend the narrative. These features rely on the qualities that Bazin and Deleuze already stress in

their writings. The distance of the action is achieved through the spatial integrity of the shot and the subsequent lack of firm perceptual direction that is ordinarily offered by analytical editing. This also provides opportunities to stage the action in the extended space presented on screen, utilising the depth to push certain elements into the distance or to place figures in relation to the surrounding environment. On the other hand, by refusing depth and stressing flatness or pictorial abstraction, the long take can also call attention to form and the presence of the camera in relation to the objects depicted. Thus, through these staging strategies within the long take there exists a dialectic between realism and formal abstraction; in both cases Bordwell observes that the events are dedramatised as a result. Furthermore, the ‘dead time’ that Bordwell and others recognise in the long take comes about precisely from a turn to emphasise the pure flow of duration, independent from narrative action. These comparisons suggest hints about the effect of dedramatisation in Bazin’s and Deleuze’s reflections, and both certainly recognise a refusal of traditional dramatic construction in the films of the neorealists and their successors, brought about largely through their use of the long take. Bordwell pushes this issue to the fore in his examination of the long take in modern European cinema. It will be helpful at this point to look more closely at Bordwell’s observations on how these features of dedramatisation in the long take arise in practice.

Angelopoulos and Dedramatisation: *The Travelling Players*

Bordwell takes as his main example of the dedramatised long take the films of Theo Angelopoulos, who provides an especially pertinent case study because his work synthesises and elaborates all the major characteristics of the long take that were pioneered by earlier modern European filmmakers. Bordwell compares Angelopoulos

in particular with Antonioni, Jancsó and Tarkovsky, thus making him a particularly significant example in relation to the interests of this thesis as well.²² Bordwell identifies a number of general stylistic patterns across Angelopoulos's oeuvre that correlate with his arguments about dedramatisation strategies in the long take.²³

The first thing Bordwell notes is Angelopoulos's pronounced use of distance shots, finding that 'even in interiors his camera assumes a considerable distance from the action, and outdoors it can reduce the humans to mere dots' (Bordwell 2005: 160). This emphasis on distance in the long take results directly from Angelopoulos's concern to preserve the integrity of the scene, which also introduces a greater degree of perceptual freedom, rather than breaking it down and analysing it through editing to firmly direct our attention to salient information. Bordwell reflects this idea when he states that Angelopoulos maintains: 'the simultaneous presence of many elements in the visual field, soliciting the viewer to search out revealing aspects; the gradation of emphasis that activates secondary elements with special vividness' (Bordwell 2005: 160). In an interview with Michel Demopoulos and Frida Liappas, Angelopoulos also personally indicates his concern to preserve wholeness and perceptual freedom in the long take. He rejects the 'artificiality' of editing, stating that 'once you change the frame, it is as if you are telling your audience to look elsewhere', and insists that 'I invite the spectator to better analyze the image I show him, and to focus, time and again, on the elements that he feels are the most significant in it' (Angelopoulos in Demopoulos and Liappas 2001: 22). This inevitably introduces some distance between camera and action, and Bordwell points out that Angelopoulos exploits this

²² See *Figures Traced in Light* (Bordwell 2005: 158-159). Bordwell's chapter on Angelopoulos here largely expands on his earlier essay 'Modernism, minimalism, melancholy: Angelopoulos and visual style' (1997).

²³ Andrew Horton also refers to Angelopoulos's films specifically as 'dedramatized', noting that they 'prove more static than active and more silent than argumentative' (Horton 1997: 78).

possibility to greater extremes than most of his predecessors, pushing the action into the far depths of the shot. Combined with this proclivity for camera distance, Bordwell also identifies an emphasis on emptiness within the frame. He writes: ‘the Angelopoulos long shot tends to be sparse. The frame is not literally empty – some human figures are usually visible – but only a few sectors of space are activated, the rest being neutralized or serving to frame the action’ (Bordwell 2005: 164). Angelopoulos therefore diminishes the drama in his long take by greatly limiting our access to the details of character performance; he does not cut-in to medium shots or close-ups to provide a privileged view of the emotions and actions on display. Framing the characters from such a distance and holding this view throughout the scene, they become less psychologically driven individuals than moving (or static) figures. And the reduction of human-centred dramaturgy is further elaborated by the vacancy of his distant long take, which tends to privilege desolate landscapes and interiors, sites of inaction, over active space.

Within Angelopoulos’s distant long take, Bordwell also finds a notable tendency towards both ‘recessive’ and ‘planimetric’ staging schemas to dedramatise the action. He notes that Angelopoulos employs extensive ‘recessive’ perspectives that ‘diminish our view of salient information’ and force us ‘to concentrate on very distant clues to the plot’s progress. The spectator must strain to follow the tiniest wrinkles in the action’ (Bordwell 2005: 169). Staging the scene far into the depth of the shot and refusing to cut into this depth, Angelopoulos establishes not only a physical distance from the action, which frustrates the communication of narrative information; he also cultivates an emotional distance. Bordwell writes: ‘Angelopoulos, in flagrant defiance of audience empathy, often makes his characters retreat from us ... and the scene’s climax may be played out at the points farthest

from the foreground' (Bordwell 2005: 172). But at other times, Angelopoulos also achieves this emotional distancing in a very different way, by resorting to the flatness of 'planimetric' composition. Bordwell finds various examples throughout Angelopoulos's films where he arranges the characters in 'ribbons' or 'clotheslines' across the width of the frame, diminishing the appearance of natural depth and creating 'pictorial abstraction'.²⁴ His emphasis on geometric visual form in the 'planimetric' long take distracts from the psychological and emotional core of the drama and redirects attention to the rigorously constructed nature of the action, and the camera's presence in relation to the events it depicts. Bordwell indicates that these 'recessive' and 'planimetric' strategies form two 'image schemas' that Angelopoulos applies to the events across his films, establishing set modes of presentation.²⁵ These pre-established schemas thus divert from a more conventional approach, where the film's presentation is determined by the dramatic significance of the individual scenes. According to Bordwell, Angelopoulos's films 'confine us to certain sorts of images' (Bordwell 2005: 175), and the action is presented in these particular ways independent of the dramatic nature of the events within the scene.

Combined with these dedramatised staging options, Bordwell discovers a prominent emphasis on 'dead time' in Angelopoulos's long takes. These observations, in fact, follow Angelopoulos's own comments about his handling of time within the shot, which he indicates in several interviews. In one interview, entitled 'Animating Dead Space and Dead Time', Angelopoulos tells Tony Mitchell that he opposes what he calls a 'cinema of efficacy', where time is artificially reduced to match the developments of action. Instead, Angelopoulos states: 'there is a material, concrete

²⁴ See *Figures Traced in Light* (Bordwell 2005: 172-173).

²⁵ Bordwell identifies 'the Angelopoulos café', 'the Angelopoulos roadside' and 'the Angelopoulos beach or riverside' as particular examples. See *Figures Traced in Light* (Bordwell 2005: 173).

sense of time; real time, not evoked time. In my films “dead time” is built in, scripted, intended’ (Angelopoulos in Mitchell 2001: 32). Thus, for Angelopoulos, the use of real duration through the long take also allows him to introduce periods of ‘dead time’, where narrative development is slowed or halted.²⁶ Subsequent commentaries on Angelopoulos’s films often cite Angelopoulos’s remarks about ‘dead time’ in his films and Raymond Durgnat, in particular, notes how the filmmaker employs duration to detract from the drama, writing: ‘the reflective *temps-morts* flatten those sharp peaked rhythms of action, decision, or suspense, that might disrupt and supersede our sense of time. Working together, these features of form and information elongate *duration*’ (Durgnat 1990: 43).²⁷ Bordwell elaborates on these comments, noting the ways that Angelopoulos’s staging decisions introduce protracted periods of ‘dead time’ in the long take. In particular, he points out that time becomes pressing due to Angelopoulos’s use of distant framing and emptiness in the shot. Bordwell writes:

The sparseness of the frame affects the pacing of the long shot. If the viewer is fully to take in such distant images, they must be held on the screen for some time. Yet by refusing to pack them with movement, Angelopoulos brakes [sic] the dramatic rhythm. (Bordwell 2005: 164)

Action is limited in his long take by reducing the characters to figures in the landscape and by emptying the shot largely or entirely of any human presence. Furthermore, Bordwell notes that, frequently, ‘the very scale of what counts as action in these frames poses a problem’ (Bordwell 2005: 175). Angelopoulos’s camera lingers on insignificant events, following the characters as they slowly wander

²⁶ Angelopoulos echoes these comments on the importance of time in his long takes in a later interview with *Cahiers du Cinéma*, stating ‘my personal film language is based on expanding the dimension of time. Before you enter into the gist of any given shot, you have to be given the time to find out the relations between the actor and the landscape. For this reason I love Tarkovsky’s *Stalker*’ (Angelopoulos in Toubiana and Strauss 2001: 64). For his further discussions about time and the long take in interviews see ‘Angelopoulos’s Philosophy of Film’ (O’Grady 2001: 72-73) and ‘National Culture and individual vision’ (Horton 2001: 87).

²⁷ For further references to ‘dead time’ see, for example, ‘Angelopoulos, Greek History and *The Travelling Players*’ (Georgakas 1997: 32) and ‘Theo Angelopoulos: landscapes, players mist’ (Wilmington 1997: 63).

through urban streets and rural countryside or stand entirely still for extended periods, observing details in the distance. As Fredric Jameson notes, the characters move ‘without haste, with an intolerable leisureliness ... as if that slowness and that movement were an event in itself’ (Jameson 1997: 82). Through the duration of the shot, such minor activities are indeed raised to the level of events, as dramatic action fades. Bordwell argues that the proliferation of such moments of ‘dead time’ in Angelopoulos’s long takes establishes ‘a tempo that drains normal dramatic momentum out of the scene’ (Bordwell 2005: 177). And by refusing the efficiency of analytical editing, Angelopoulos dedicates significant amounts of time to details that divert from the communication of narrative development in the shot.

Bordwell argues that Angelopoulos’s various dedramatising strategies result in a shift of attention away from the drama towards other features present in the films. He notes that, through his use of the long take, Angelopoulos becomes keenly interested in visual composition, ‘build[ing] the shot toward a purely pictorial climax’ (Bordwell 2005: 177). In particular, he stresses the presence of the landscape, which overwhelms individual characters within the shot. Alternatively, we are also encouraged to apprehend the ‘monumental patterns’ created by Angelopoulos’s arrangement of figures in space and his turn to pictorial abstraction.²⁸ Furthermore, Bordwell suggests that Angelopoulos’s long takes encourage the spectator to appreciate and anticipate the developments of the staging itself – the ‘dynamic of opening and filling space’ – in the moment-by-moment progression of the action. He notes that: ‘thanks to the long take, the muted action, and the dead intervals, Angelopoulos prolongs the process of staging, leaving us plenty of time to recognize that we are forming expectations about where the character or camera will go next’

²⁸ See *Figures Traced in Light* (Bordwell 2005: 176-177).

(Bordwell 2005: 180). Horton also reflects these notions in his observations on Angelopoulos's filmmaking, noting that 'he calls on the audience not only to follow what is going on *but to be aware of the process of the unfolding of a moment or moments as they occur in time and space*' (Horton 1997: 8). The concern with landscape, visual patterning and staging trajectories in Angelopoulos's long take therefore marks a preoccupation with the formal texture of the image, which in turn mutes the drama by supressing and decentralising the communication of narrative information.

The ideas about dedramatisation in the long take that Bordwell puts forward in his discussion of Angelopoulos can be considered in more detail by examining a single film in more detail. Examining Angelopoulos's filmmaking as a whole, Bordwell's examples tend to be brief and removed from the wider context of the film in which they form a part. It therefore seems appropriate at this point to explore how these observations on the long take emerge and interact more fully in a particular scene from a given film, notably Angelopoulos's breakthrough work, *The Travelling Players* (*O Thiassos*, 1975). The film follows the turbulent period in Greek history marked by World War II and the bloody civil war that followed, which is shown from the perspective of a company of travelling actors. Despite the highly charged nature of the events that comprise the narrative, however, Angelopoulos avoids any conventional dramatic engagement. The film is presented in a series of extended sequence shots where the camera captures all the action in a single space, without breaking the events down into their parts and providing closer views through analytical editing. Michael Wilmington notes in his discussion of the film that the long takes compel us 'to piece together the truth from the tableaux-scenes that are always shown whole, while situating ourselves in the "dead space and time" (as

Angelopoulos calls them) of those agonisingly, beautifully protracted pans and tracking shots' (Wilmington 1997: 63). Many of these scenes revolve around confrontations between two opposing groups, which also represent the wider historical and ideological conflicts of the period that Angelopoulos examines in the film.

In one scene, the film depicts a street battle between communist partisans and right-wing government forces, which marks the start of the civil war. The scene begins with the players huddled together in an empty, darkened courtyard. From off-screen a single voice sings a communist chant and the characters then move away cautiously through the backstreets. They witness a group of armed men in suits and hats on the main street and then make their way back in the opposite direction, where they discover a group of communists at the other end of the street. The players then shelter by an abandoned building and the camera turns to the street, showing the two forces clash. The men in suits are the first group in shot and they start firing at their communist rivals off-screen. When they retreat under fire, the communists enter the space of the street, singing and firing at their enemies in the off-screen space on the other side of the frame. The communists then retreat out of shot, pursued by military jeeps, and the camera returns to the group of actors as they once again negotiate their way through the backstreets to escape the fighting. This time they succeed and after they disappear out of shot into the distance the scene ends on the empty street with the faint singing of the communist leader in the distance.

The street battle scene is representative of many other moments in *The Travelling Players* that depict significant turning points in the historical period and in the film's narrative. Yet these major events are not emphasised or clarified using traditional dramatic conventions but appear comparatively played down. This can be

seen as a result of the long take and its strategies of dedramatisation that Bordwell outlines. Firstly, from the very start of the scene there is a notable distance from the characters. In the opening framing, the players are huddled against a wall on the other side of the courtyard to the camera. When they cross to the other side of the street they are then framed at a further distance. Except for when the characters briefly pass the camera as they negotiate the streets, Angelopoulos does not provide medium shots or close-ups to focus on their psychological or emotional response to the situation. Rather, they remain a group of moving figures against the urban landscape. Similarly, during the confrontation on the main street between the two opposing forces, the camera is again held at a distance from the action, providing a long shot of the space in which the fighters appear as tiny figures. Angelopoulos does not cut into the action to place us within the battle and to emphasise the drama with shock cuts to explosions and wounded soldiers. The position of the camera holds us back both physically and emotionally from the brutal nature of the action; the men appear less like human beings than chess pieces moving back-and-forth in a game. The scene is also notable for its emptiness, which is largely encouraged by the camera's distance from the action. Taking up very little space in the shot, the characters are visually overwhelmed by the night-time darkness and the bare walls of the environment that surround them. When the scene begins, for instance, the players take up under a quarter of the frame, gathered in the corner of the courtyard. The camera's framing of the battle is also noticeably sparse, comprising only about a third of the space in the shot, with the empty foreground and night sky above filling the majority of the screen. The prominence of inactive space in these moments appears to dilute the focus on dramatic action and to minimise its overall presence in the scene.



Fig. 5.1 *The Travelling Players* (1975)



Fig. 5.2 *The Travelling Players* (1975)

The action in this scene is further minimised in several moments of ‘dead time’, when the shot is held on spaces entirely vacant of any human beings. For example, when the players return to their initial location after the first failed attempt to escape, the camera follows the group’s leader, Aegisthus (Vangelis Kazan), to an opening onto the main street. He then runs back to the others but the camera does not follow him; it remains fixed in position on the empty street for an extended period before the communists enter the space and continue moving forward towards their enemies. During the battle that ensues there are several points where the camera remains fixed on the empty street for some time between the retreat of one force and the advance of the other: first when the right-wing militia fall back under fire from the off-screen communists and then when the communists in turn retreat from the army. Finally, at the end of the sequence, the camera holds on the empty backstreet after the players have exited the shot and the only sign of life is the faint singing of the communist leader off-screen in the distance. Here Angelopoulos expressly avoids editing to remove the empty, ‘dead’ moments between events; using the long take he refuses to order the space and time of the scene exclusively around the developments of the action. Furthermore, much of the action itself is minimal, the camera most often following the players as they walk tentatively through the backstreets, or revealing the opposing forces as they gradually approach each other on the main street. The battle itself comprises a relatively brief part of the whole shot.

Angelopoulos’s staging of the street battle scene demonstrates a combination of both the ‘recessive’ and ‘planimetric’ schemas that Bordwell also identifies. There is a tendency to stage the action into the depth of the shot, which, combined with the camera’s distanced framing, significantly diminishes our view of dramatic details. This is apparent as the players make their way through the backstreets to avoid the

confrontation. Rather than using camera movement or cutting to follow them closely, Angelopoulos allows the group to retreat into the depth of the shot where they settle briefly, first against a shadowy wall and then within the deserted courtyard, before they retreat into the background and disappear at the end of the scene. However, the staging of the street battle itself demonstrates the flat ‘planimetric’ staging that Bordwell underlines as another dedramatising technique Angelopoulos adopts in the long take. The battle is not staged across various planes within the depth of the shot, with some figures closer to the camera while others are positioned further back. Instead, fighters on both sides move forwards and backwards on the same spatial plane in the shot, confined to the horizontal line of the street that runs across the frame at a set distance. While the action is plunged into the depth of the shot, with the battle taking place at a distance from the camera, the background plane is flattened, drawing attention to the geometric arrangement of the figures as they move in and out of the frame. The rigorous visual design of the shot thus emphasises the constructed nature of the action, which encourages a further emotional distance from the events depicted.

Bordwell’s conclusions about Angelopoulos’s concern with pictorial composition in his dedramatised long take are evident in the street battle scene. The distant framing, the emptiness and the periods of ‘dead time’ allow the landscape to become more than just a backdrop for the action. The camera explores the urban environment, with its shabby yet solid walls and its maze of streets and courtyards, through which the figures shift in their aimless movements from one place to another. The film appears to be as attuned to these visual details as it is to the action that takes place within the landscape. Jameson notes that Angelopoulos’s films provide ‘an ontology of stone and rain, depth, the tangible and the resistant ... image is too

subjective a term for the weight and solidity of these constructs, or for the texture of the walls themselves, and the cobblestones' (Jameson 1997: 84). This attention to the material presence of the environment in Angelopoulos's cinema, which, as Jameson suggests, is a direct result of the photographic realism of the long take, becomes clear in the street battle scene. Angelopoulos is concerned as much to explore the urban landscape as he is to follow the protagonists's drama, as they negotiate the space in an attempt to escape to safety, and also the drama of the battle itself. Nonetheless, these actions are not overwhelmed by the surrounding empty space of the environment, and Angelopoulos is also concerned to chart their movements in space.

The film stresses the arrangement of movement patterns in the scene, both in relation to the figures within the shot and to the camera within the wider location. As Jameson suggests, 'these films are also very much in motion, in movement', and the environments 'are also stages of time and sequences of approach ... thus everything is in movement here' (Jameson 1997: 85). The street battle scene is built on a series of back-and-forth movements that form a number of relatively precise patterns. The players move from their initial position to hide in the shadows beside a wall where they spot the first group of fighters. They then move back in the opposite direction to the other side of the courtyard where they find the communists and, once the battle has ended, they make their way in the opposite direction once more, settling by the wall again before they head down the street, away and out of shot. These movements are matched by the camera, which tracks and pans from side to side across the space, following the players as they negotiate the streets. Most obviously, however, is the movement pattern created during the confrontation between the two opposing forces as they move into and out of the frame one at a time, advancing and then retreating to allow the advance of the other group. These rigorous movement patterns encourage us

to appreciate and anticipate the developments of the staging as it unfolds; we become familiar with the movements of the fighters into and out of the shot, which allows us to form expectations about how the scene will develop: one group of figures will retreat out of shot, emptying the space, which will then be filled by the other group as they enter the shot and fire at their enemies off-screen. These features of the scene's visual design mark an emphasis on formal composition in Angelopoulos's work that deviates from the more conventional practices of narrative cinema, where visual style works in subtler ways to underscore the drama without overwhelming or distracting from it.

Bordwell's precise observations on the stylistic patterns of the long take in modern European cinema are made evident in his discussion of Angelopoulos's cinema, and this can be observed in the particular sequence taken from *The Travelling Players*. The street battle involves distant framing and empty space, as well as 'recessive' and 'planimetric' staging strategies, which interact to build up a space that refuses to emphasise narrative details or encourage emotional involvement with the characters. These spatial features are also interconnected with the temporal unfolding of the scene to make 'dead time' proliferate, with multiple periods of emptiness and inaction, or where the camera follows the minor actions of the figures. All these elements of the long take divert from the dramatic situation depicted in the scene to focus instead on the visual qualities of the shot: the details of the urban environment and the precise movement patterns of the figures and the camera within this environment. But a question that remains to be considered is for what purpose Angelopoulos pursues a dedramatised aesthetic through the long take in the film. Dan Georgakas offers an explanation in his essay on *The Travelling Players* by pointing out that 'among the fiercest theoretical debates that raged in the 1960s among leftist

film critics was how political issues could best be presented onscreen' (Georgakas 1997: 27). He notes that some filmmakers 'favoured having radical content wedded to popular formats, as this would provide easy access to the largest possible audience', but, on the other hand, 'opposing this strategy was the view that radical content could only be faithfully served by a format that rejected the conventions of dominant media as resolutely as it rejected its ideology' (Georgakas 1997: 27).²⁹ Georgakas states that Angelopoulos falls into the second group, observing that '*The Travelling Players* has become emblematic of the political film made by an auteur who rejects mainstream conventions' (Georgakas 1997: 27). Angelopoulos's use of the long take in the film, and its resultant dedramatisation, can thus be seen in one important way to establish a politically radical aesthetic that works together with the political subject depicted in *The Travelling Players*.³⁰

Georgakas identifies several features of Angelopoulos's long-take style that overlap with Bordwell's observations on the filmmaker's dedramatisation strategies, arguing that the filmmaker needed to 'analyze the dominant elements in Hollywood features and seek viable alternatives' (Georgakas 1997: 31). Georgakas then goes on to outline these 'alternatives', stating that: 'if Hollywood extolled rapid cuts and furious pacing, one needed to consider the possibilities inherent in the long take, languid pacing and the tableau ... to investigate the advantages of the long shot and

²⁹ Georgakas appears to refer in these comments particularly to Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni's observations in their seminal editorial for *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 'Cinema/Ideology/Criticism', originally published in 1969. The writers identify a number of politically-based filmmaking categories, the most important of which, for them, is the second: 'films which attack their ideological assimilation on two fronts ... Economic/political and formal action have to be indissolubly wedded' (Comolli and Narboni 1976: 26). Kovács also refers to the period from around 1967 to around 1975 specifically as 'political modernism'. See *Screening Modernism* (Kovács 2007: 349-382).

³⁰ Two earlier articles on the film also stress its political form. See Susan Tarr and Hans Proppe's '*The Travelling Players*: A modern Greek Masterpiece' (Tarr and Proppe 1976: 5-6) and Peter Pappas's 'Culture, History and Cinema: A review of *The Travelling Players*' (Pappas 1977: 36-39).

the de-emphasis of individual performance', and he also notes that, instead of being 'emotionally seduced, it might be useful to call attention to the camera and to finds [sic] means occasionally to distance audiences from their emotional responses' (Georgakas 1997: 31). These features reflect the emphasis on distance, formal staging and 'dead time' that, for Bordwell, characterise Angelopoulos's long takes. Furthermore, although Bordwell dedicates most of his discussion to identifying the various stylistic features of dedramatisation in Angelopoulos's films and examining how they work on the immediately narrative level, he also recognises the political purposes underlying their deployment. Bordwell writes: 'all the techniques we have examined accord with the goals of a "political modernism." By concentrating on groups and by staging in a manner at once minimalist and monumental, Angelopoulos blocks traditional paths to empathy', and as a result, 'this yields a critical detachment that in turn invites us to reflect on the larger historical forces at work in the situation' (Bordwell 2005: 184). This becomes clear in the street battle sequence, where Angelopoulos's various dedramatising strategies in the long take work to distance us from the action in order to reflect on the wider historical and political significance of the events: the players' back-and-forth movements showing their entrapment between the two opposing groups, ordinary people caught in the brutality and suffering inflicted by the political conflict; the movement of the opposing forces into and out of the fixed frame, a series of repetitions without any sense of development, which reflects the failures of history, the inability to move forward, to achieve a state of democratic harmony. Through his emphasis on visual patterning and composition, rather than dramatic performance, Angelopoulos thus introduces a politically interrogative presentation of the narrative.

However, questions can be raised about whether this marks a genuine turn away from dramatic engagement, as Bordwell contends, or whether the long take, in fact, works to reconceive a highly dramatic style on different terms from those relating directly to narrative comprehension. This is Klevan's argument in his discussion about the 'melodrama of time' in the work of some post-war European filmmakers, which was introduced in chapter three. Klevan identifies the same formal qualities that Bordwell raises in relation to dedramatisation, but he offers a different interpretation. Klevan writes:

Time appears to be pressing in the shot, stretched and tense. The visual patterning and composition are forceful, even though the plotting is not. The characters in such films are often left obsessively to observe, which allows for the films' heightened visual drama. (Klevan 2000: 46)

Seen in this light, the emphasis on 'dead time', the formal staging patterns and the attention to pictorial composition in the long take, all which distract from dramatic narrative construction, lead to a stylistic drama that is equally strong. By contrast, the films that Klevan suggests involve a genuine move away from melodrama altogether 'are marked by subdued styles dependent on an evenness of tenor' (Klevan 2000: 44). Klevan's undramatic films expressly avoid the long take because the technique makes everyday, ordinary situations appear much more pressing and intensive.³¹ Klevan's ideas are also reflected in some of the critical responses to Angelopoulos's films. Anne Rutherford, for example, is particularly critical of Bordwell's comments on Angelopoulos's long take because he 'severs visual technique from the performative unfolding of a film across time' (Rutherford 2004). She argues that it is 'this temporal amplification which is at the core of Angelopoulos' cinematography', and stresses

³¹ Klevan's main examples are Robert Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest* (*Journal d'un curé de campagne*, 1951), Milos Forman's *Loves of a Blonde* (*Lásky jedné plavovlásky*, 1965), Yasujiro Ozu's *Late Spring* (*Banshun*, 1949) and Eric Rohmer's *A Tale of Springtime* (*Conte de printemps*, 1990). Interestingly, all of these films would fall under the category of 'art-cinema narration' according to Bordwell, but their visual styles differ from the filmmakers examined in this thesis.

that ‘all of the elements he deploys are fused together, pressured, transformed by time’ (Rutherford 2004). Rutherford also indicates that ‘even on the level of shot construction, Angelopoulos’ image and sound are conceived in terms of dynamic energies which escalate with the pressure of time’, and she observes that through the duration of the long take Angelopoulos establishes and builds heightened tensions between elements of the scene, such the ‘static, monolithic city structures and the movement of figures that run in diagonals across them’, the movement of the characters and ‘the relentless, exuberant movement of the camera’ and also ‘between vision withheld and the knowledge that breaks through the shot with the sound’ (Rutherford 2004). Yvette Biro also further emphasises these notions about the temporal drama of Angelopoulos’s long takes, insisting that ‘within the boldly extended duration, the protagonists’ transfigured destiny is elevated in a majestic aura’, in which ‘Angelopoulos’s wanderers explore the drama of passing time’ (Biro 2008: 163). Thus, while duration might promote a sense of ‘dead time’ that for Bordwell works to dedramatise the narrative, it also introduces other qualities in the long take that make the events appear highly dramatic in other ways. By not addressing these other, more immediate and affective dramatic possibilities, Bordwell’s theory of dedramatisation in the long take is limited only to its narrative dimension.

The ‘heightened visual drama’ that Klevan emphasises in relation to the long take, and which critics such as Rutherford and Biro seem to reflect in their comments on Angelopoulos specifically, can also be observed in the street battle scene from *The Travelling Players*. Although Angelopoulos utilises distanced framing, emptiness and includes several moments of ‘dead time’, the scene remains incredibly ‘tense’. Time is ‘pressing in the shot’ as we observe the duration of the build-up to the

confrontation, beginning with the off-screen chant and then the glimpses of the two forces approaching each other on the main street, while the players unsuccessfully attempt to escape the dangerous situation. During the battle, time remains 'stretched and tense' as the camera stands fixed on the open street, observing the duration of the movements into and out of the frame, retaining those periods of stillness between the departure of one group and the arrival of the other, when the battle may be over, or it may be about to escalate further. The 'visual patterning and composition' are also notably 'forceful' in the scene. The back-and-forth movements of the characters and the camera become the dominant focus for our attention. And it is through these visual arrangements that Angelopoulos conveys the shifting developments of the action in the scene, the players' evasion of the militants and the battle between communists and government forces. Furthermore, although the characters themselves are not shown to watch the developments taking place around them, the camera itself 'obsessively observes' the environment and the movements within it without breaking its intensive gaze. The nature of the staging, together with the camera's distanced view, does foster an emotional and psychological detachment, but we are still closely engaged in the film due to Angelopoulos's arresting, meticulously composed images of figures moving in space.

Bordwell is right to point out that the long take, as it is used by filmmakers such as Antonioni, Tarkovsky and Angelopoulos, works against standard practices of dramaturgy, as represented by classical analytical editing. And it is undeniable that the narrative is dedramatised in their films, largely through the use of the long take. However, as the observations of Klevan and others suggest, his account does not fully take into consideration the alternative dramatic possibilities offered by the long take because these achievements lie beyond the terms of narrative communication and

comprehension that form the basis of Bordwell's cognitive-perceptual criticism. His methodology demonstrates some shortcomings by remaining focused only on narrative denotation, neglecting to consider the other ways in which we can engage with these films. Nonetheless, Bordwell's observations do still offer some important insights into these films, even if they are limited to one function of the images. We might therefore conclude that dedramatisation in the long take involves a de-emphasis of narrative communication, which in turn leads to a heightened sense of drama on the more immediate visual level, as time becomes pressing in its autonomy from narrative action. To turn this idea around, we might also say that an emphasis on intensive visual and temporal form in the long take diverts from the more conventional dramatic engagement with the narrative. The conditions of this dedramatisation are therefore more complex and multifaceted than might at first be apparent. I shall now further examine the opportunities that such a dedramatised form offers (especially in political terms) by turning in chapter six to examine two films by one director, seeing how these films utilise the heightened visual and temporal qualities of the long take for particular purposes.

CHAPTER SIX:
SPACE, MOVEMENT AND POLITICS IN *THE ROUND-UP* AND *THE RED*
AND THE WHITE

‘It seems to me that life is a continual movement. In a procession, a demonstration, there’s movement all the time, isn’t there? It’s physical and it’s also philosophical ... the camera movements I create suggest that too’ (Miklós Jancsó in Armes 1976: 153)

This chapter will examine two films by the Hungarian filmmaker Miklós Jancsó, *The Round-Up* (*Szegénylegények*, 1965) and *The Red and the White* (*Csillagosok Katonák*, 1967), considering how his use of the long take in these two films works to dedramatise the events. Following the ideas about dedramatisation put forward by Bordwell in the previous chapter, my analysis of these films will look in more detail at the specific staging strategies that Jancsó employs in the long take to shift attention away from dramatic narrative engagement to focus on the visual elements of the shot and their shifting developments in space over the course of its duration. This analysis will also observe how Jancsó utilises the dedramatising possibilities of the long take in the service of his political concerns, examining concepts of oppression and revolution through the staging of figures in the frame, composition and the movement of the camera.

Jancsó was greatly influenced by Antonioni’s achievements with the long take in the 1950s and early 1960s and his films combined the mobile sequence shots and choreographic staging as well as the precise, abstract compositions of figures in empty landscapes that are demonstrated in *Cronaca di un amore* and his later films.¹

¹ Jancsó acknowledges the influence of the earlier filmmaker, stating in an interview with István Zsugán that he ‘learned a lot from Antonioni’ (Jancsó in Zsugán 1968: 24). Roy Armes elaborates on this comment, noting that ‘his admitted master was Michelangelo Antonioni ...

However, Jancsó does not focus on individuals in the contemporary environment but, rather, depicts larger collective groups in specific historical periods. Kovács notes that with Jancsó's cinema: 'the general existentialist angst toward human emptiness is reinterpreted as the angst caused by the incalculability of historical and social conditions' (Kovács 2007: 330). Jancsó focuses on periods from the historical past that are defined by political conflict and which centre on the clash of two opposing social groups. In *The Round-Up*, the action is set in a penitentiary on the desolate Hungarian plains during the 1860s, and it depicts the opposition between the imprisoned rebels of the failed 1848 uprising, and the ruling authorities. The film concentrates on the conflict between the rebels' ambitions for freedom and the authorities' objective to eradicate (by any and all means) the threat posed by the rebels to their power. *The Red and the White* is set in the later period of the Russian Civil War, and focuses on the switching of power back-and-forth between the two opposing armies of the Bolshevik Reds (including a number of Hungarian Internationalists) and Imperialist Whites in the rural region surrounding the river Volga.

Bordwell notes of these films that 'the situations are intrinsically charged with dramatic voltage – guards confronting prisoners, commanders randomly pulling captives for execution – but Jancsó short-circuits the emotional effect' (Bordwell 2005: 156). For Bordwell, Jancsó becomes a prominent filmmaker of the dedramatised long take tradition. Critics also point to this dedramatised aesthetic in Jancsó's films. For example, Penelope Houston observes that Jancsó's films withhold 'the most ordinary kind of dramatic information, stripping content to the bare bone of

examining the style, the dramatic structure, the utilization of space, actors, movements, gestures, dialogues. The long take – what the French call the *plan séquence* – he learned from Antonioni' (Armes 1976: 144).

action, refusing to explain, justify, psychoanalyse or simply narrate' (Houston 1969: 116). Brian Burns also notes that 'Jancsó's is a cinema of looking, rather than of feeling ... Jancsó resolutely avoids emotive involvement' (Burns 1996: 55), and he goes on to observe that 'a Jancsó film is not normally a story in the accepted sense of the word; its narrative is elusive and diffracted, a matter not of action in time but of activity in space' (Burns 1996: 57). By examining such wide-scale historical conflicts in these films, Jancsó distances us from the characters and he avoids any sense of psychological involvement in the depiction of the events. The characters in *The Round-Up* and *The Red and the White* therefore become less individual, human subjects than moving figures in the landscape.² In both films, Jancsó's extensive use of the long take becomes central to this approach by privileging staging patterns and visual composition over dramatic narrative engagement, and these features fall in line with the principles of dedramatisation that Bordwell observes in his discussion of modern European cinema that was outlined in the previous chapter.

Through the long take, Jancsó often maintains a distant perspective on the events, allowing the action to unfold within the space on screen, without cutting into it to emphasise particular details or to encourage a greater sense of emotional involvement with the characters. Instead, he stages large-scale choreographies as single, uninterrupted events. As Yvette Biro notes, 'the evolution of events – or to put it in other terms, a structure based on action – remains the central principle and the basic medium for the elaboration of the subject matter' (Biro 1979: 119). Graham Petrie similarly points out that 'during filming, Jancsó's major concern is with the use

² In his article, 'Jancsó Shooting' (1968), Gyula Maár provides an informative account of Jancsó's working methods on the set of *The Red and the White*, which testifies to his avoidance of psychological dramaturgy. Maár notes that during the shooting of the film, Jancsó's only instructions to the actors were 'always some kind of physical instruction. He only keeps an eye on the dynamics of the scene' (Maár 1968: 26).

of space and ... with the rhythmic utilisation of that space through the moving camera' (Petrie 1998: 5). This is further supported by the ultra-wide anamorphic format used in *The Round-Up* and *The Red and the White*, which provides the expanse of space within the frame required by Jancsó to develop his staging extensively. Each of Jancsó's long takes therefore present a kinetic spectacle of moving figures in which his control of the total spatial dimensions, over the duration of the shot, creates a vision of political conflict that is coldly distant and abstract. The space on screen approximates that of a chessboard, and humans become pieces in a game where movements determine victory or defeat. Combined with this spatial distance, Jancsó emphasises formal staging strategies and pictorial composition in the long take, rather than dramatic performances. Kovács points out that there is 'an increasingly ornamental use of character and camera movements. Since no spatial structure determines these movements, they will be organized by ornamental repetition of movement patterns' (Kovács 2007: 331). These movement patterns involve both the 'recessive' and 'planimetric' schemas that Bordwell observes, with soldiers or rebels often retreating into the depth of the shot where an important confrontation or development will take place, or with the action arranged on a single plane to stress the geometric patterning of the image. In each case, the staging in the long take works to dedramatise the action and, as Kovács suggests, there is 'a total reduction of the human element to objecthood, an element of the landscape' (Kovács 2007: 331). At the same time, however, Jancsó achieves a heightened state of visual drama, in line with Klevan's notions about the 'melodrama of time'. The rigorous patterning of the image and its development over time through the long take becomes compelling. Even Bordwell recognises this point, stating that 'oxymoronic as it sounds, Jancsó's version of dedramatization is florid, even "maximalist" ... Although Jancsó avoids

traditional dramatic appeals like psychologized protagonists, he offers a robust kinetic spectacle in their place' (Bordwell 2005: 157). The shots are constantly in motion, with physical activities taking place across the vast desolate landscapes that form the background to the events.

The constant, shifting movements of characters and camera in Jancsó's films means that 'dead time' is less of a prominent factor. Very rarely does the camera linger on emptiness, inaction or minor and limited activities. Nonetheless, time in Jancsó's long takes is not determined by causal narrative development, and duration becomes a significant feature; it is through the continuity of unfolding, experienced temporality that the staging is able to develop, remaining in a constant state of motion. Biro writes that 'for Jancsó, time has a *body*, a physical existence, for he does not strip it of its carnal dimension in which action clothes it' (Biro 1979: 120). In this chapter I shall expand on these general observations by examining the precise compositional and staging strategies that Jancsó employs in *The Round-Up* and *The Red and the White* in order to foster a dedramatised aesthetic, where the immediate visual qualities of the shots become most insistent and present to our attention. However, we shall also see that Jancsó pursues this approach for specific reasons, relating to the political concerns that form the basis of the narratives.

The scenarios of *The Round-Up* and *The Red and the White* allow Jancsó to explore different aspects of his central preoccupation with political power. This concept becomes the basis of his filmmaking throughout the 1960s and 1970s, reflected both in the fictions depicted and their depiction through the long take. These films thus demonstrate the significant shift towards a political emphasis in modern European cinema in the second half of the 1960s, which was frequently aligned with a

dedramatised aesthetic.³ In *The Round-Up*, Jancsó's political conception is manifested in the form of oppression, where the authorities maintain superiority over the rebels throughout. The film demonstrates the mechanics of power as it is practiced by oppressors over oppressed. In *The Red and the White*, emphasis is placed on the capturing and losing of power, its exchange between the Red and White armies. Although oppression remains a key element in the film, with both sides enacting their power over the other at different points, Jancsó deals more specifically with the process of revolution. These themes are not elaborated in the films through psychological narrative, but instead through Jancsó's attention to visual patterns and movement in the long take. Kolker observes that 'for him, the dialectical process is fluid and continuous and must be perceived as such ... He develops it as the movement of forces, manifested within shots in the activities of his characters. (Kolker 1983: 311-312). Jancsó stages a series of almost autonomous sequences in these two films that are based on patterns of repetition with variation, organised around the political concepts of oppression and revolution. As Kovács notes:

Each step in the process stands alone separated by a logical gap from the previous and following ones. The only thing that links these steps together is that they are individually organized by similar rules ... That is the ritual of power. This ritual is not instrumental in reaching any specific goals. (Kovács 2007: 335)

By adopting a dedramatised form, Jancsó examines notions of oppression and revolution in abstract, universal terms; although the films deal with specific historical events, his presentation of the action as movement patterns in long takes allows them to become more generalised and conceptual in nature. The images reflect ideas about political power, and the way it is manifested through oppression or revolution, as a

³ In this respect, Jancsó's films mark an important precursor to Angelopoulos's work of the 1970s. Kovács also stresses the connections between the two filmmakers, noting that 'Jancsó and Angelopoulos followed a symbolized and radicalized variant of the Antonioni long-take style' (Kovács 2007: 372).

process rather than exploring the particular reasons behind it. The following sections of this chapter will also examine this issue in greater detail by observing how Jancsó's specific dedramatising strategies work to elaborate the political concepts underlining the films and how this is realised in particular examples.

Enclosed Space and Ritualised Movement: *The Round-Up*

The most striking feature of the long take in *The Round-Up* is the repetition of long shots depicting the characters' movements on the vast, empty plains that surround the prison where the film is set. These shots place an emphasis on the composition of space and the movements of the staging rather than attempting to involve us with the individual characters. Jancsó also utilises the visual elements of the shot to show the oppression of the authorities over their prisoners. Most importantly, although the space of the shot is wide-open and largely empty, it is essentially enclosed and entraps the characters. This is initiated in the opening shot of the film. On the horizon a long line of figures, stretching the length of the frame, move slowly towards the camera. Simultaneously, cavalry troops enter the foreground from behind the camera and charge into the depth of the shot. They encircle the middle group in the distance, then race back towards the camera, crossing the frame diagonally. The size and stillness of the shot draws attention to the horses as they criss-cross the space within the frame, moving at great speed into the background and then returning to the foreground. Their movement underscores the degree of mobility offered by the open landscape. With no geographic features to guide or obstruct their path they have total freedom. This is countered, however, by the figures approaching from the background, who are moving from the open landscape towards the camera, marching in regimented lines, led by further cavalry officers beside them. Through this choice of staging, Jancsó

establishes a visual contrast between the two groups in the film. The staging of the shot embodies the dialectical conflict between the authorities as oppressors and the rebels as oppressed that will be developed in various ways through Jancsó's staging of movement patterns within the long take.

A notable movement pattern that is frequently repeated in the film is the depiction of individual characters running away from the camera into the open landscape, visually indicating their move towards freedom. But none succeed in gaining the freedom that the landscape appears to offer. These attempted escapes always culminate in capture rather than escape. The first instance of this action comes at the conclusion of the first episode of the film, when the unnamed prisoner (József Madaras) is isolated from the other inmates, taken to the authorities' quarters for interrogation and then allowed to leave. The prisoner begins to walk away, into the distance of the shot. The official watches, standing completely still, his back to the camera. When the prisoner reaches some distance in the background there is a sudden and unexpected gunshot, which rings out across the empty landscape and the man stops, falling to the floor dead. Although the movement of the unnamed prisoner into the landscape is a clear move toward freedom, Jancsó shows that there is, in fact, no escape from the oppression of the authorities. This is indicated not only through the movement of the character and his sudden, mortal immobility, but also through Jancsó's precise arrangement of the composition and his subtle movement of the camera. The camera is placed inside the doorway of the cabin, looking out onto the landscape beyond, with the prisoner and black-cloaked official standing on the other side. As the prisoner walks away the camera pulls back to fully reveal the doorway, creating a frame within the frame, surrounding him on all sides. The composition of the shot is thus rearranged so that the open field is enclosed by the interior of the

authorities' quarters, creating a stark composition that reflects the idea of his entrapment in purely visual terms. Despite being allowed to leave, the prisoner remains under the oppression of the authorities. The framing demonstrates that they have complete power and mastery over the space. But this is indicated not only by Jancsó's inclusion of certain visual elements within the shot, but also in what he chooses to leave unseen. The gunshot that comes from off-screen signals the notable absence of the executioner, who is never revealed. Jancsó utilises off-screen space in the long take to suggest the unseen and unknown nature of the mechanics of oppression.



Fig. 6.1 *The Round-Up* (1965)

Another example of this staging pattern within the long take occurs later in the film when a group of prisoners are taken onto the field outside the prison to collect food parcels brought by peasant women. Jancsó's staging of the action in the shot demonstrates, though with some variation from the previous episode, the power of the authorities over the space and the subsequent entrapment of the prisoners. The camera focuses on one of the prisoners called Béla (János Koltai), who has become somewhat

familiar from previous sequences. He observes the guards as they walk behind the captives and then move out of the shot. At this point he makes an attempt to escape, running away into the open field. The camera frames the man from behind as he runs towards the women in the distance of the shot. The guards then enter the frame in the foreground, shouting at the man to stop and firing rifles into the air, but they do not shoot him. Unlike the prisoner in the first sequence, Béla is not shot down as he moves away. Instead he is apprehended by the women in the background and then escorted back by two guards. His capture by the women, rather than the guards themselves, signals the extent of the authorities' power, using the peasants against each other. This is something that Jancsó explores in a number of ways throughout the film, as the officials manipulate the prisoners to work against each other in their interests. Here, as elsewhere in *The Round-Up*, Jancsó presents this idea primarily through the staging and visual design of the shot. The camera remains fixed in its position to present the movement of the figures in the otherwise empty landscape. In this long shot, Béla is reduced to a miniscule figure as he flees into the distance and the lines of peasant women in the background also stress the compositional arrangement of the shot. Rather than involving us with the character, following him closely as he attempts to escape, and cutting between him, the guards and the women to build dramatic tension in the action, Jancsó's long take presents the action dispassionately and at a distance, interested in the characters as elements of the visual design.

A near-identical repetition of this pattern depicting the attempt by characters to escape the authorities takes place later in the film, though with a notable and somewhat ironic difference. In this final escape attempt, it is the peasant women themselves who flee the guards, before being apprehended and then executed in the

following scene. Jancsó adopts the same static, long shot composition of the open plain showing the characters moving away from the camera into the distance, repeating the pattern of the two previous escape sequences. For the majority of the take the only figures in the shot are the women, running into the distance. Only when they are far in the background do the guards enter the shot, strolling calmly in the foreground looking towards the women who are now in the far depth of the frame. Unlike the previous sequence, there are no figures in the background to assist the guards in apprehending the escapees and for a moment Jancsó allows the possibility that the women may, indeed, achieve the freedom implied by the openness of the landscape. However, the situation is suddenly altered when cavalry officers charge from behind the camera into the shot, converging on the women and apprehending them on the horizon. As in the shots discussed above, the staging and composition within the long take indicates the entrapment and oppression of the peasants, which forms the basic organisational concept of the film's movement patterns. The camera does not follow the women but shows them as minute dark spots within the blank space of the environment. The soldiers on horses are also presented as small figures in the shot, and it is through the movements of these two opposing groups in the fixed frame of the long take that Jancsó presents the enclosed and entrapping nature of the space. Rather than focusing on dramatic performance, Jancsó's camera is concerned with the more abstract visual patterns of the moving figures as they recede into the background, where the capture takes place.

In *The Round-Up* there is also a repetition of Jancsó's staging patterns in the long take that comprise a series of ritualised displays in which the prisoners 'perform' their role in the power hierarchy. Kovács identifies this significant feature of Jancsó's long takes in the film, and he observes that this also relates to the enclosed and

entrapping nature of the space: 'a character's movement cannot possibly lead him out of the situation from which it starts. Movement of the characters as well as the camera therefore becomes increasingly ritualised and ornamental' (Kovács 2004: 113-114). As Kovács suggests, the movements of the characters do not reflect a dramatic performance based on psychological motivation but, instead, build an abstract choreography that is based purely on action. The long take is central to this presentation and Kovács points out that 'the ornamental nature of these movements makes it necessary for the camera to follow them at length, like a dance or a ballet, driving Jancsó to create a style based on the extreme long take' (Kovács 2004: 114). By preserving the integrity of space and the continuity of duration, the long take presents these movements in their moment-by-moment developments and it is through such visual arrangements that Jancsó stresses the concept of oppression that underpins the action. This can be observed in most scenes throughout the film, but it becomes particularly notable in a few particular examples.

Jancsó's ritualised staging in the long take becomes apparent when one of the prisoners that the film follows for a period, János (János Görbe), returns to the prison yard following an interrogation. Here, he and the spectator are met with a striking visual display: a group of prisoners are marching in a circle, chained together and blinded by hoods placed over their heads. A guard orders their movement calling out the marching pace. Jancsó presents the action in a single long take that follows the action within the yard. The shot begins with the camera at a high angle, looking down over the prisoners marching in the yard. It then descends to ground level as the prisoners are ordered to stop and are marched up to the cells. The guard continues to call out the marching pace and they move in two lines to each set of steps leading to the cells. The camera follows one line of prisoners, whose hoods are removed as they

reach the steps. It then changes its direction, following one of the guards over to the other side of the yard to where the same action is taking place at the other set of steps. The movement of the prisoners in the shot is overtly ritualistic, indicating in visual terms the power relations of the characters. The action of marching, hooded, in a circle is a pointless task that serves no purpose but to show their total servitude. Even once the task is complete, the formal movement of the prisoners back to their cells continues the ritualistic style of the staging. By showing the action in a single take, Jancsó allows the movement of figures to take place before the camera uninterrupted. He synchronises the continuity of action with the continuity of its presentation, rendering the choreographic patterning of character movement as it develops in space and over time. Therefore, the action within the shot is emphasised as a visual spectacle and becomes a ritual display of power.



Fig. 6.2 *The Round-Up* (1965)

The ritualised nature of the staging becomes apparent to an even greater extent later in the film, when one of the peasant women is executed following the scene when the group are captured by the cavalry soldiers. Jancsó constructs the execution

as an overt display of the power relations between authorities and prisoners, in an act of pure oppression. The sequence begins in the prison yard. In the background the women who were previously apprehended are ordered to strip. Meanwhile, a row of hooded prisoners cross the yard, walking down from the cells over to a doorway on the other side. The camera follows them as they march to the pace that is again called out by the guards. The camera then settles on the open gateway, where, in the distance, a group of guards are standing in an orderly line. Jancsó then cuts to a shot at the top of a turret on the outer wall of the prison where the prisoners are sat down, overlooking the figures below. Here, Jancsó reframes to observe the action on the ground, allowing the geometrical arrangement of guards and prisoners to become strikingly apparent, arranged in strait lines to form a large square, while in the other half of the frame we see the prisoners sitting above, also in orderly lines, with their heads still hooded. One of the guards calls out a set of orders and they rearrange into two lines next to each other, creating a passage. The woman is then led over to the guards and the men on the turret are ordered to remove their hoods.



Fig. 6.3 *The Round-Up* (1965)

But it is not only the geometrical arrangement of figures in this shot that becomes notable in the scene. The visual impact of the execution itself emphasises the event's ritualistic qualities. The naked woman is made to run back-and-forth between the guards as they beat her with sticks. The camera follows the action in close-up, panning left and right to follow the movement of the woman until her strength gives way at one end and she falls to the ground. It is a long and drawn out death that is more visually striking than a gunshot. It therefore takes on a ritualistic quality that takes the action beyond its mere functional operation. In this and the earlier scene, Jancsó thus presents a continuous performance through the long take, allowing the ritualised display of power to be perceived in an appropriate manner. Our attention is focused on the nature and development of movement within the space of the frame. The action is not dramatically functional, for there is no reason why the prisoners should be marched in circles in the prison yard, and the execution could easily have been a swift, private affair. Instead, these actions amount to performances in which the authorities and prisoners enact their positions within the power hierarchy: a ritualised image of oppression.

The final repetition pattern of action within the long take in *The Round-Up* that is of interest in this analysis relates to the transitions between different episodes of the film. The structure of the film is divided into three episodes.⁴ The first follows the unnamed prisoner as he is led from the prison to the hut and then shot. The next, and the longest, focuses on János as he tries to save his own life by finding a prisoner who has committed more murders than him. This episode ends when he is found

⁴ Kovács divides the film into six episodes. See 'Szegénylegények/*The Round-Up*' (Kovács 2004: 110). However, four of these are linked together by centring on the character of János. As these four parts of the film's narrative focus on this single character, whereas the others focus on entirely different characters, we can consider them to constitute a single episode in the film.

strangled in his cell. The final episode depicts the interrogation of the three men implicated in János's death, before all the prisoners are conscripted into the army, where the rebel gang members unwittingly identify themselves to the authorities and are finally apprehended for execution. These three episodes are disparate in narrative terms, and do not amount to a causal development from one to the next over the course of the film. Like the individual scenes, the episodes are based on variations of the same patterns of action, based around the concept of oppression. For example, the opening episode is entirely self-contained; there is no more significance attached to the unknown prisoner in the rest of the film. And in the final episode, after the initial interrogation of the three prisoners about the murder, János is entirely forgotten as the film focuses on the prisoners' military conscription. But although each episode is autonomous, a transition between them is marked by overlapping action within the same shot, which visually connects the otherwise disparate events. This connection between the episodes further indicates the essentially enclosed space of the film, in which there is no possibility of escape from the power of the authorities. However, this idea is reflected only through the compositional arrangement of the figures and their movements within the long take; it is not dramatically emphasised in any way through dialogue or performance. Jancsó again relies solely on the visual patterning of the shot to indicate his political concerns.

In the first episode, the camera follows the prisoner as he approaches the officials' quarters for interrogation. When he reaches the corner of the building, however, the camera shifts its focus, leaving the prisoner to follow another official, who walks to the other side of the building to greet an old woman. The camera then follows both of them back to the other side where the woman enters a doorway to identify two dead bodies on the floor inside. Jancsó then cuts to the final shot of the

episode. The woman confirms the bodies to be her husband and son. She and the man then exit the shot as the unnamed prisoner and official enter once more to have a brief discussion before the man is allowed to leave and he is unexpectedly shot down in the distance. Within the sequence, the action appears as an ambiguous aside to the main focus on the unnamed prisoner who Jancsó has, until this point, followed without interruption. But in the next scene, the film returns to the woman as she identifies János in the prison yard, which begins his story, and he is subsequently discovered to be the murderer of the two men. These developments are not emphasised by the camera, however, which follows the movements of the various figures into, out of and through the space of the frame without clarifying their connections.

The transition between the second and final episodes of the film takes place in two long takes that comprise the final scene of János's story. In these two shots, Jancsó arranges his compositions once more to indicate an overlap between the episodes. The first shot begins with János entering the prison yard where, as in the earlier sequence, a group of prisoners are hooded and marching in a circle. He enters from the doorway in the background while an official oversees the prisoners in the foreground. The official orders János to sit in the corner of the yard and calls for the prisoners to be given their provisions. A guard enters the shot and informs him that the provisions are usually given in the cells. The camera moves in closer to the men as the official orders the guard to give the prisoners their provisions in the yard. As the guard exits the shot the official immediately looks to János sitting on the ground behind him. In the next shot, the bowls are laid out and the prisoners are unhooded. The camera follows them as they move towards the wall, near to where János is sitting, in order to collect their bowls and then they sit in lines on the ground. At this point, János is escorted to the cells in the background of the shot, while the prisoners

eat in the foreground. On the left edge of the frame is an older man, on the right edge is a man in a leather jacket and just behind him is the older man's son, the three men being composed in a triangle in the shot. This framing of the three prisoners in a triangle amongst the other prisoners links them, with the man in the leather jacket being most prominent; he is later identified as the one who commits the murder. Therefore, they are presented as the murderers before it becomes apparent that they will play a central role in the following part of the film.



Fig. 6.4 *The Round-Up* (1965)

However, the sequence is yet more complex in its use of composition. At the end of the take, Jancsó frames the official on the right of the screen and János in the far corner while, on the other side of the screen, the man in the leather jacket and the son remain in the shot. The official then announces aloud which cell number János should be placed in. By panning from the three prisoners in a triangle to the son, the man in the leather jacket and the official in another triangle, Jancsó indicates the implication of the authorities in János's death, which is already hinted in the previous shot by the official's glance towards János when ordering the provisions in the yard.

Thus, Jancsó reveals the plans of the authorities through his staging within the shot; the official orders the prisoners to eat outside their cells so that they become aware of János and he announces the cell number intentionally, so that the men overhear and are subsequently able to commit the murder. Jancsó again shows how the authorities extend their power and control by using the prisoners against each other. When János is no longer of any use to the authorities they make sure he is dispatched, but rather than executing János themselves, they manipulate the other prisoners into doing their work for them. This narrative strategy of connecting the different episodes through action within the long take further indicates how Jancsó uses the technique to organise the events around the concept of political oppression. Kóvacs notes that although Jancsó ‘keeps the illusion of a linear plot development in *The Round-Up*, he makes it clear that this will not lead out of the situation from which the story begins ... Thus, the linear plot development is basically circular. (Kovács 2004: 113). Each episode in the film displays a different variation on the organising principle of the authorities’ oppression of the prisoners. But the overlapping of the episodes, in these transitional long takes, expands this organisational principle beyond the individual shot to the overall pattern of the film. Thus, each long take embodies, in repetitive but varying forms, the structure of the film as a whole.

Multiple Actions and the Mobile Frame: *The Red and the White*

In *The Red and the White*, Jancsó utilises the same basic forms as in *The Round-Up*, but he develops them more extensively. The long takes are even lengthier in their duration, with many scenes covered in a single sequence shot. The dramatic elements are also further reduced, with many more characters and less individualisation. As in *The Round-Up*, in his long takes, Jancsó stages a series of repetitive but varying

choreographies where the events are dedramatised and attention is shifted from individual psychological performance to the visual arrangements of the staging and the composition. Laszlo Strausz notes that, in *The Red and the White*, by ‘constructing impersonal contrasting compositions, Jancsó emphasizes geometry and, in doing so, does not allow any form of character identification to the viewer. This geometrical style seemingly refuses to take sides in the conflict’ (Strausz 2009: 43). Furthermore, we can see that, in this film, these visual elements of the shot are geared towards revealing the process of revolution as the Red and White armies move back and forth capturing and then losing land. Movement in the landscape is again a key element of the long takes in the film. But Jancsó develops this attribute to a greater extent than in his previous film. In *The Red and the White* he utilises the dimensions of the widescreen space comprehensively, with action taking place in fore, middle and background, as well as to the left and right sides of the frame. Related to this extended use of screen space, Jancsó develops another aspect of the staging, which is the appearance of multiple actions taking place simultaneously. In *The Round-Up* there is a tendency to deal with a single action or event at a time, following it from start to completion. But in this film there is often a multiplicity of events taking place within the same shot at the same time. The result is a situation that is far more chaotic, which reflects the film’s central concept; Jancsó is no longer dealing with the refined mechanics of oppression, but rather the turbulence of the revolutionary battlefield.

The film’s opening image is a map depicting the Western region of Russia, where the film is set. On it are numerous arrows of different sizes pointing in various directions, indicating the movement of armies in the landscape. The opening sequence shot that follows reflects the initial graphic illustration and sets the standard for the other episodes in the film. The sequence depicts the first of many battles between the

Red and White armies. Within the space and time of this single long take, Jancsó depicts a number of different actions, centred on different characters. The attention shifts between Laszlo (András Kozák), another Red soldier, White cavalymen, a Cossack and an old man. Jancsó stages these different actions across all dimensions of the space, from close to the camera to the far distance. At the start of the shot, Laszlo backs into the foreground of the frame, firing at his off-screen enemies. Directly behind Laszlo is an old man lying on the ground. The camera follows Laszlo as he makes his way along a wooden barrier, reloading his rifle and firing more shots off-screen. As he does this, another Red soldier enters the shot on the other side of a small stream. On the horizon, barely noticeable, a troop of White cavalry charge towards the camera. A number of shots are fired and the man runs back to the river. At the same time Laszlo, in the foreground, exits the river, climbs the bank and takes refuge in some bushes on the far edge of the shot. The soldier on the other side is apprehended by the Whites once they reach the stream, he removes his jacket and is forced into the stream by one of the men on horseback, following him into the water. As this is taking place, another horse crosses the frame in the foreground, ridden by the Cossack. He then takes control of the captured soldier, leading him along the barrier in the foreground. He then orders him into the stream where he shoots the man dead. Meanwhile, the other horsemen ride away into the background. The camera then follows the Cossack as he turns his attention to the old man before he leaves.

The width of the space is also made prominent in the shot, with the near constant left/right movement of characters along the wooden barrier, which is further emphasised by the tracking of the camera. Firstly, the camera tracks along with Laszlo as he backs into the shot and moves leftwards towards the bushes. Later in the sequence, the Cossack leads his captive along the barrier before sending him into the

stream. Then, after the execution, the Cossack climbs the bank, walks towards the bushes on the far side and fires a further two shots into the river. He walks back and mounts his horse, further interrogates the old man, and then rides toward the bushes yet again, turns around and gallops out of the shot. As he does this, the camera continues its leftward movement to the bushes, where Laszlo emerges from his hiding place. He descends into the river and the camera continues to track with him as he makes his escape, before the shot comes to an end. Such kinetic activity embodies the confused and chaotic situation, the moment-by-moment changes of direction, both physical and political, that for Jancsó underline the constant flow and process of revolution. One moment the Reds are in control of the space, with Laszlo having shot down a number of White troops. But within the course of the shot they are defeated, with the sudden arrival of the White cavalry and the Cossack, who apprehend and execute the Red soldier.



Fig. 6.5 *The Red and the White* (1967)

In a later sequence, the chaotic nature of the situation is demonstrated by the multiplicity of movement within the shot to an even greater extent. Jancsó again

stages a number of actions taking place both simultaneously and contiguously. The sequence begins with one of the Hungarian Reds, András (Tibor Molnár), who, fleeing the Whites, arrives at a farmhouse where he attempts to hide from his pursuers. He passes a well and a peasant woman carrying buckets. As he reaches the house in the background, a voice from off-screen orders the woman to put down the buckets. White cavalymen then enter the frame and surround the woman, followed by the Cossack from the earlier sequence. He walks over to the woman and interrogates her. Behind them, standing at the well, are three other soldiers. The Cossack then orders over two other peasant women. He asks if a man is hiding in the house, at which point he turns his attention to András, who is being led up the hill by another White soldier on horseback. The soldier then rides away into the background. The Cossack escorts the woman over to the well, while in the distance a line of soldiers can be seen approaching. The Cossack leaves the woman to deal with András. He orders him to remove his shirt and tells one of the other soldiers to execute the man. András is led out of shot while the camera remains fixed on the Cossack. A gunshot signals András's death. Meanwhile, the troops in the background continue to approach the camera. In the foreground, the Cossack orders the two other peasant women to remove the first woman's clothes. He leads her over to the well and tells her to remove her undergarment. At this point, the soldiers have almost reached the foreground. Jancsó then cuts to the second shot showing the woman manhandled by two of the White soldiers. He then cuts back to the Cossack watching the woman. The troops continue to approach, while another White officer on horseback charges into the foreground towards the Cossack. He then orders him to remove his belt and walk over to the troops as the other soldiers are also apprehended for their abusive actions.

The focus of the sequence shifts numerous times throughout the shot, with characters entering and exiting the frame, and moving incessantly from one place to another. Action is also staged throughout the depth of the shot, with the troops approaching from the distance while numerous events are taking place in the foreground. Their arrival marks an unexpected change as the Cossack moves suddenly from a position of power to one of powerlessness. The sequence therefore displays the chaotic multiplicity of movement organised around the film's central concept; it details, through the staging of action within continuous long takes, the fluidity of the revolutionary process.



Fig. 6.6 *The Red and the White* (1967)

The movement of figures in *The Red and the White* is more chaotic than that displayed in *The Round-Up*, but it can also be characterised as ritualistic. The characters perform an almost primal, physical version of battle. There are no complex strategies or psychological motivations beyond capturing and retaining land. They accept defeat immediately and without retaliation, consigned to their new position within the power hierarchy. This is indicated visually by the removal of a soldier's

uniform down to his white undershirt, which occurs throughout the film, each time a soldier is captured. Furthermore, the killings are notable for the lack of blood or injuries; when a man is shot he falls to the floor dead, always with a single shot. For Jancsó, the image of a man shot is enough to convey the nature of the action, without the necessity of naturalistic, melodramatic detail. He thus reduces the action down to the point where it becomes a ritual performance of the dialectical conflict between the two groups, and the shifting power balance between them. This remarkable dedramatisation of the action through the long take places emphasis almost entirely on the visual elements of the shot, and their shifting arrangements over the course of its duration, as a means to reflect on the political issues raised in the film.

The ritualised nature of the staging in the film is best illustrated in the final confrontation on the banks of the Volga. The shot demonstrates all the aspects of Jancsó's ritualised staging. A small group of Red soldiers are outnumbered by their rivals. Instead of retreating, the commander (Mikhail Kozakov) removes his jacket and orders the other troops to fall in line. They also remove their uniforms and line up in formation facing the enemy troops at the bottom of the hill. The way Jancsó presents the confrontation is even more important, however, with the camera remaining at a great distance from the action to provide an extreme long shot showing the vast landscape around the river. Biro notes that Jancsó's films 'are notable for their unusual treatment of proportion: in a powerful and indifferent natural setting the individual is diminished in stature. In their scale and duration, takes with a propensity for long shots represent this correlation as well' (Biro 2008: 119). This is no more apparent than in the final confrontation sequence, where the vast size of the shot reduces the men to moving dots on the empty landscape. He presents a stark image of conflict where the men are reduced to tiny figures in a geometrically precise pattern of

movement on the endless landscape. The Reds march into shot from behind the camera wearing their undershirts and singing ‘The Marseillaise’ as they approach a huge army of Whites, arranged in several long lines in the distance. The camera remains fixed as the men disappear below the hill and then re-emerge as tiny figures at the bottom, slowly approaching the vastly superior enemy. They fire a number of rounds at the Whites and a few figures drop to the floor, but they are still no match for the opposing force. Nonetheless, the Reds continue running towards the enemy until they reach a close proximity, at which point they are shot by the Whites in a precisely coordinated pull of their triggers. The Reds fall to the ground simultaneously. The single shot that rings out across the land, killing all the Reds instantly, becomes the culmination of the ritual, signalling the exchange of power once more.



Fig. 6.7 *The Red and the White* (1967)

While *The Red and the White* marks a continuation and development of Jancsó's approach to staging, what is most notable about Jancsó's long takes is the dynamic mobility of the camera. Camera movement is also used in *The Round-Up*, but it is mostly functional, allowing Jancsó to follow the characters as they perform an

action from start to completion. In his earlier film, Jancsó's long takes function to a greater extent through their intricately arranged and precisely staged compositions. In *The Red and the White* the compositions are less aesthetically refined, largely due to the near constant alteration of the frame. More importantly, however, the camera is no longer attached to a particular character, or set of characters, at the centre of a scene. It moves through the space and between individuals to observe numerous details within a wider event, taking place around it. Brian Burns writes that 'within each intensely concentrated long take there is a kind of "interior montage" – the camera moves endlessly, with a feral vitality which often seems at odds with its subject-matter, giving us virtuoso displays of cinematographic acrobatics' (Burns 1996: 57). Whereas in *The Round-Up* it is clear that Jancsó stages the action for the camera, here the camera itself becomes an element in the staging of the wider action, which it also films.⁵ The camera movement in the long takes becomes another feature of their dedramatised aesthetic. As Lorant Czigany observes, 'it is the almost incessant movement of the camera by which Jancsó achieves detachment' (Czigany 1972: 49). By refusing to remain with a particular character or group, shifting between various sites of action in a space, the camera does not allow us to get involved with the situation of individuals, but emphasises the wider movements of the event as a whole. It is though this attention to the wider shifting forces of the scene, of which the camera becomes a part, that the long take further introduces the idea of revolution in visual terms.

⁵ Gyula Maár, in his discussion of the film's production labels Jancsó's shots 'sight-seeing rides', describing them as follows: 'the camera is taking part in the gigantic confusion as a continuous observer, it walks with a perfect naturalness in the very centre of the event, it stops if it wants to eye something and starts if some kind of new motion carries it off' (Maár 1968: 28).

The camera's roaming observation is particularly apparent in the scene early in the film, when the Whites capture the monastery and proceed to gather and execute some of the Reds in a courtyard. Jancsó films the action in two extensive long takes. The first begins with a group of cavalry officers approaching a gateway in front of the camera. Another White officer in the foreground orders them away in a different direction. The camera then follows him into a large courtyard where a number of Reds have been apprehended and stripped down to their undershirts. The action is framed in long shot, showing the long line of captives, who are ordered to walk forward to the officers and back again to the wall behind them. This action is repeated several times. Two of the Reds are then picked out of the line by one of the officers and led to the corner of the yard near the passageway where the shot began. As they reach the corner, a line of other Red captives cross the frame in the foreground. The camera now shifts its focus from the previous men to one of the men in the foreground, who is stopped by the same officer and ordered over to where the others are standing. Almost as soon as he is stopped, the camera shifts its focus again to the other men entering the yard, who are ordered to remove their shirts and boots. The men then join the large line and the camera pulls back slightly into a long shot once more. Simultaneously, the cavalrymen from the start of the shot enter the yard from another gateway on the far side. The Cossack, who is leading the cavalry, picks out two Reds, one being Laszlo, and the camera follows them over to the previous officer, who then dismisses them and they exit the yard. At this point the situation changes, but the action continues in the same shot. The camera follows the prisoners who were earlier isolated. They are led into the passageway where the shot began. As they arrive, another troop of White officers enters through the gateway and the camera follows the commander into the yard. He looks back towards the other soldiers, at

which point Jancsó cuts. In the shot that follows, the camera displays an equal degree of mobility, shifting between the yard and the passageway, from the captives to the officers, as the Reds are ordered to run for the exit on the far side while the White officers shoot them down with rifles. The camera follows their movement closely but it is completely detached. As soon as they are shot, its attention shifts to another point of interest. One of the captives is not even seen as he is shot. Jancsó instead chooses to focus on the officer who hesitates to shoot and intentionally misses, and the commander who jams the rifle before another officer takes the fatal shot.

The numerous shifts of focus between characters and spaces are facilitated by the agile camera, which is able, through its movement, to present a series of actions that flow continuously from one to another to make up the scene. The camera reflects the dynamic nature of the staging, building a state of chaos through its observation of disjointed action. There are so many unexpected developments that no presumptions can be made about the course of events. Although the action taking place is ultimately oppressive, the mobility of the camera creates the impression that the power hierarchy could change at any moment. Thus, a revolutionary aspect remains prominent in the sequence. This becomes yet more notable some time later in the film, when the central location of the action moves to a field hospital on the banks of a river. Again, Jancsó films a multiplicity of actions in a sequence shot that runs the length of the scene, and this time he further extends the ability to change the frame by also using a zoom lens. In this scene, there is a marked tension between the events taking place by the river and those just outside the hospital building, which is emphasised by the camera's continuous shifting between the two poles, picking-up and leaving different characters as they move from one place to the other. The camera shifts focus between no fewer than four different characters, or groups of characters, over the duration of the shot.

The sequence begins with a wide-shot of the river, showing two figures cross from the far side and emerge in the foreground. The camera then turns away from them and briefly zooms into another man still in the water, who then swims out of shot. The camera shifts back to focus on Laszlo, exiting the reeds of the riverbank and running up the grassy bank towards the wooden buildings of the hospital. He slows down and then runs towards the camera, which continues to move sideways approaching a building in the foreground. Laszlo moves towards a line of shirtless soldiers lying on the ground with a nurse attending to them. The nurse then runs away to another building in the background and Laszlo joins the other men on the ground. At this point another woman, Olga (Krystyna Mikolajewska), backs into the shot from the other side of the building. The camera then follows her as she walks towards the river. In the background two other nurses are called down to the river by White officers on a rowing boat. The focus of the action now changes again. Olga walks out of shot and the camera zooms in to observe more clearly what is taking place on the riverbank. One of the Whites steps onto the jetty where three topless soldiers are laying and shoots them. Immediately following the last gunshot, Olga steps back into the frame in the foreground and Jancsó shifts focus to isolate her in close-up. The camera then zooms out and follows her back up to where the men are lying on the ground. Here she meets another woman, the Matron (Tatyan Konyukhova). After a short dialogue, Olga is sent out of shot and the Matron asks the men if they speak Russian. Laszlo rises and both characters walk back to the river. The camera zooms in on the characters, framing them in a close two-shot as the Matron asks Laszlo to identify the dead soldiers. He then exits the shot and Olga is ordered to retrieve the bodies from the river. The shot ends on another wide framing of the river as Olga joins the other nurses in the background.

The elaborate mobility of the camera in this sequence, and the one previously discussed is exemplary of most long takes in the film. This produces a different conception of space to that in *The Round-Up*. Where Jancsó had previously developed a sense of space that was essentially closed, designed to entrap the characters, here he stresses openness; the situation is dynamic and ever changing. The inevitability of the outcome in *The Round-Up*, in long takes depicting the prisoners' failed attempts to escape the authorities, is replaced by uncertainty over which way events will develop, what new information will arise. This is particularly evident in the hospital sequence as new characters unexpectedly appear, without prior indication of their presence, notably when Olga backs into the foreground of the shot for the first time and the camera switches focus to her, or when Jancsó follows her back to the line of men, revealing the presence of the Matron.

In his discussion of space and narration in Jancsó's later film, *The Confrontation* (*Fényes Szelek*, 1968), David Bordwell makes some observations that are equally applicable to *The Red and the White*, with both films demonstrating the same basic stylistic features, based on the dedramatised long take.⁶ Bordwell discovers that 'there is an unusually tight connection between narrative comprehension and spatial perception. If the classical film establishes the space before the action gets going, Jancsó's film synchronizes the presentation of action with the revelation of space' (Bordwell 1985: 130). For Bordwell, Jancsó's film is based on the development of narrative action in space, in which the long take plays a significant role in shaping our comprehension of the spatial development taking place. He argues that 'Jancsó's shot presents an evolving narrative situation in a way that makes the viewer engage in a process of framing and testing purely spatial

⁶ See *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Bordwell 1985: 130-146).

hypotheses' (Bordwell 1985: 136). Bordwell's comments are also apparent in the sequences described above, where the movement of the camera between different spaces is synchronised with the different actions taking place, each of which is unexpected, and something of a surprise. What Bordwell does not point out, however, is the way that these spatial developments in the long take are related to Jancsó's political concerns. For him, 'such general implications, however, do not account for the film's spatial style. The same information could be extracted from a film staged and cut in traditional fashion' (Bordwell 1985: 136). Jancsó could utilise standard practices of analytical editing and narrative dramaturgy to reflect on the political issues at the centre of the film, but he chooses instead to promote these ideas through the dedramatised form of the long take, which presents notions of political power, such as oppression and revolution, in a more abstract, universal form; he shows them as processes, reflected in the movements of the staging and the camera, rather than investigating the reasoning behind them. As Czigany notes, 'the style serves his purpose effectively' (Czigany 1972: 50). We can see that Jancsó's conception of space in *The Red and the White* is essentially the same as *The Round-Up* in its organisation around the concept of political power. But where entrapment is the basis of the oppressive nature of space in *The Round-Up*, here Jancsó creates an open and dynamic space, based on his concern with revolution. The movement of the camera presents a situation that is fluid and ever changing, where power can be lost or gained at any moment.

The camera's near-constant movement and its synchronisation of space and action in *The Red and the White* makes off-screen space another significant factor of the long take in the film. The action is not confined to the space on screen, but spills over into the space surrounding the camera. The mobility of the frame reveals

different actions taking place in the scene, but it also hides certain actions. This is apparent in *The Round-Up* to some extent, such as the unseen gunman who executes the prisoner in the film's first episode. But in *The Red and the White* the greater degree of camera mobility means that off-screen space becomes a much more constant feature of the long take. This is particularly evident in two important sequences where, like the earlier film, a transition takes place within the shot. Here the transition is not only to a new episode, but is a transition of power from one group to the other.

In the first part of the film, the monastery is under the control of the Reds. Returning to the monastery, a Hungarian commander (József Madaras) discovers the guard in the bell tower missing and goes to investigate. The camera watches from above as he ascends the stairs and it tilts up to follow him looking around in the empty passageway at the top of the tower. The sound of footsteps is then heard, indicating someone approaching from the stairs, behind the camera. The camera remains fixed in the same framing, focusing on the commander, who pauses and strolls back towards the camera, looking off-screen. He raises his hands, throws down his rifle and removes his uniform in a ritual gesture of defeat. As he removes one of his boots, the commander unexpectedly leaps out of the shot, jumping from the bell tower to the ground below. As soon as he leaves the frame, two White officers enter in the foreground and look down to where the commander lies dead. This moment indicates the capture of the monastery and the transition of power from Reds to Whites. Later in the film there is a reversal of circumstances, as the Reds capture the field hospital. The transfer of power in this instance comes at the end of a four-minute sequence shot in which the Whites are at the height of their dominance over the Reds. The camera follows the White captain, who hands his pistol to another officer and

follows him along a line of Red patients lying on the ground as they are shot. The executions are then interrupted by the sound of horses crying frantically from somewhere off-screen. The camera follows the White officers to the riverbank, revealing a group of unmanned horses on the other side of the river. The captain then moves back towards the camera. Suddenly a gunshot rings out from off-screen and the man grabs his stomach. The camera zooms into a close-up of the man as he falls to the ground dead. Jancsó holds the close-up on the man while the gunshots are fired in the space around the camera. A pair of boots enters the frame and kicks the dead soldier onto his back. The camera zooms out and tilts up to reveal a Red commander, who fires another three shots at the dead man then moves down to the riverbank. Further Red soldiers enter the shot and the camera pulls back to reveal a number of other dead Whites on the ground. The Red commander approaches the camera again, which zooms in to frame him in close-up as the shot ends.



Fig. 6.8 *The Red and the White* (1967)



Fig. 6.9 *The Red and the White* (1967)

The transition of power in both sequences is signalled with the death of the commanding officer from an off-screen force. The Whites enter the shot after the commander has jumped to his death in the first example and in the second, following the unseen gunshot, the camera pulls out from its focus on the dead man to reveal that the situation is altered, overrun with armed Red soldiers, most Whites dead and those remaining apprehended. The fact that the enemy is never seen coming means that those in control cannot prepare to defend themselves. Thus, in an instant, the balance of power is shifted to the other party, who are then at risk of a similarly unforeseen attack. Both the Reds and the Whites gain victory and are defeated in this manner. As Kovács notes: ‘in Jancsó’s unstructured space nobody is safe, and nobody has a secure and stable place. Everything depends on momentary relations that are as fluid as the physical movements of the characters and the camera’ (Kovács 2007: 332). The sudden and unexpected change in the situation is striking because it takes place within the continuity of the long take, rather than the juxtaposition of shots. It is the tension between on-screen and off-screen space, what is seen and what is not, that contributes

significantly to the fluid, unpredictable nature of space and movement within the long takes in *The Red and the White*. Jancsó's use of off-screen space is organised around the same basic principle as the action on-screen, visually presenting the process of revolution, and the constantly shifting balance of political power.

In both *The Round-Up* and *The Red and the White*, Jancsó relies on the movement of figures in the shot, the composition of the frame, the camera's shifting coordinates within the wider space of the open landscape and the tensions between on- and off-screen action to depict the conflicts at the centre of his two narratives. These features reflect the dedramatising tactics that Bordwell observes with the long take in modern European cinema, which work to de-emphasise the narrative in favour of our engagement with the visual elements of the shot. But in doing so, Jancsó is able to foster a heightened visual drama, maintaining a sense of tension in the moment-by-moment relations between the elements of the scenes, where movements of character and camera remain uncertain and never fixed. These formal processes that Jancsó emphasises in his filmmaking accord seamlessly with the political concepts he is concerned to examine in *The Round-Up* and *The Red and the White*. They depict in visual terms the processes of oppression and revolution that form the basis of political power.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis has been to examine how the long take has been used as a filmmaking technique and considered as a critical concept in modern European cinema. Within this established field of research there have, to date, been no extended studies that centre on the topic of the long take. The purpose of this thesis has been to address this specific area of interest by examining the technique through a number of different, but interrelated, perspectives and in the work of several filmmakers of the period. By looking at the long take in close detail, this work stresses that the technique forms an integral part of the tradition of modern cinema in Europe that was dominant during the post-war era. My approach to the long take has been guided by the thought of three critics in particular – André Bazin, Gilles Deleuze and David Bordwell – and the concepts of realism, time and dedramatisation that they propose in relation the films examined here has formed the basis of my inquiry. There are some differences and, in places, disagreements about the critical significance of the technique in these concepts. However, there are patterns across the work of these critics that demonstrate some broadly accepted ideas, which return us to the basic defining features of the long take. Therefore, it is possible to identify two general issues. The first of these is the wholeness of space and action and the second is the prominence of time. These two basic qualities of the long take have also been observed across the films I have analysed in the previous chapters.

In each of the broad theories discussed in this thesis, we have seen a concern for the unity of events, which places emphasis on action and *mise en scène* within the shot, rather than moving between elements in a scene using editing. Bazin observes that the spatial integrity of the action in the long take demonstrates a respect for the

real, physical relations between the elements. He points out that the long take refuses the analysis and subsequent abstraction of action offered by editing, in favour of a style that draws on cinema's photographic basis to capture the 'continuum of reality' in the shot. And he discovers, as an important result of this respect for spatial integrity, that the long take promotes a relationship with the film that more closely reflects our existence in the world. It allows the freedom to select what elements to observe and it retains the fundamental quality of ambiguity that forces the spectator to interpret the meaning of the action. Deleuze builds on this notion of ambiguity to see a crisis of action, which I have suggested is central to the long take as it is used by the filmmakers in question, focusing on idle periods and limit situations that do not follow a clearly defined chain of action. Bordwell also calls attention to the spatial integrity of the action in the long take, but he sees this not in relation to the realism resulting from cinema's photographic basis. His starting point is rather the communication of narrative information and, following his observations, we see that the long take suppresses this process through the camera's distance from the action and its refusal to cut in to clarify significant details. Together with this distance is a tendency towards empty space in the frame that makes the story much more difficult to follow and the action is therefore dedramatised. There is a shift of emphasis away from the emotional and psychological aspects of the action to the visual design of the shot. However, the dedramatisation of the narrative actually leads to a heightened visual drama in these films, as Andrew Klevan suggests, due to the forceful nature of the composition.

The four main examples analysed in the previous chapters of this thesis each stress the unity of action and *mise en scène* through the long take, and this wholeness is central to their various artistic purposes. In *Cronaca di un amore*, we have seen that

Antonioni directly follows neorealism's concern to place the characters within their physical and social surroundings, utilising the extensive depth of field of the shot and a highly mobile camera to make the environment a significant feature of the scenes and not merely a backdrop to the action. It is through this relation of character and landscape that Antonioni is able to explore the psychological angst of the central couple while remaining detached from their subjectivity. In *Stalker*, Tarkovsky also places his characters in relation to the surrounding textures of the physical world they inhabit, which allows us to grasp the materiality of the natural and manmade environments. Jancsó also relies on the unity of space and action in *The Round-Up* and *The Red and the White* to stage his extensive choreographies of moving figures against vast, desolate landscapes. It is through the relations of groups in this open space that Jancsó is able to present stark displays of political power that show the processes of oppression and revolution with intense visual impact. In all these films it is therefore apparent that the long take promotes wholeness within the shot, rather than dividing the events into their separate parts and reconstructing the scene through analytical editing. As such, the action is much less articulated and more highly ambiguous, which requires greater effort on the part of the spectator to identify the significance of the action. On the other hand, however, the long take opens up the possibilities to create significance through the relations between elements in a single space. It is this emphasis on the relations between things that I have suggested is central to the aesthetic achievement of the individual filmmakers, and the broader long-take tradition, examined in this thesis.

In each of the theories discussed in the earlier chapters, time also becomes a significant issue in the long take. Bazin points out that the long take privileges real time, depicting the physical, experienced duration of people and things. It refuses the

temporal manipulations of analytical editing and, in particular, the use of ellipsis, which cuts out any moments of time that are not related exclusively to the dramatic development of the action. Instead, the long take draws on cinema's inherent ontological potential to capture 'the image of things [that] is likewise the image of their duration' (Bazin 1967: 15). Deleuze expands on Bazin's comments about film's inherent temporality to show a shift where time becomes dominant in the shot as action is reduced and loses its control over the unfolding of events. Duration is no longer shown indirectly, as the measure of movements in space, but is presented directly. Bordwell, on the other hand, offers a different perspective on the issue of time in the long take. Rather than echoing Bazin's and Deleuze's focus on duration, following Henri Bergson's philosophical thought, he stresses the problems of narrative time. Bordwell emphasises the proliferation of 'dead time' in the long take, when plot development comes to a halt and the communication of relevant story information fades, promoting the dedramatisation of the narrative.

Time becomes an essential feature of the long take in the four films examined in this thesis. Antonioni follows his characters for long periods of 'dead time' in *Cronaca di un amore* as they pace around, brooding over their guilt about the murders they do not actually commit, meeting in isolated locations where they do nothing but discuss their thoughts and feelings. In *Stalker*, Tarkovsky emphatically stresses the flow of duration in the shot as he reduces action to a bare minimum, focusing on the inactive, temporalised bodies of the three protagonists and the material textures of the physical world in the process of decay. The continuous duration of the long take is also fundamental to Jancsó's aesthetic in *The Round-Up* and *The Red and the White*, where the incessantly shifting figures and camera within the open landscape build a kinetic design that reflects the unending processes of political power over time. It is

apparent in each of the films examined that the experience of time becomes a central quality of the long take, and this experience encompasses both the characters in the fiction and the spectator in a shared duration over the course of the shot. This experience of time, however, goes hand-in-hand with periods of 'dead time' in the narrative, as the long take outlasts its necessity to communicate the plot development. But as time develops beyond its fixture into narrative, new dramatic opportunities are opened up, as we experience the moment-by-moment existence of people and things, the tensions and connections that are fused together or steadily tear apart through time. And our attention to details and actions is heightened by duration in the fixed gaze of the camera. Modern European cinema in the post-war era sought to observe the world in new and challenging ways, which refused the easy comforts of classical narrative. By revealing and emphasising events in their wholeness, their ambiguity and in their duration, the long take became a powerful tool for filmmakers to realise these ambitions.

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